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THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT IN THE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 1835-1861

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate  
School of the Ohio State University

By

Victor B. Howard, A. B., A. M.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Ohio State University  
1961

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## CHAPTER I

### THE DIVISION OF 1837

In 1824 in central western New York, Charles G. Finney began a career in ministry that was to have far-reaching implications for the religious as well as the civil life of the people of the United States. In July of that year he was ordained by the Presbytery of St. Lawrence, and assigned as a missionary to the little towns of Evans Mills and Antwerp in Jefferson County, New York. Under the vivid preaching of this ex-lawyer a wave of revivalism began to sweep through the whole region.<sup>1</sup>

Following the revival of 1824-27, Finney carried the religious awakening into Philadelphia, New York City, and Rochester, New York. The evangelistic methods, styled "new measures" by his enemies, soon brought about organized resistance on the part of the orthodox Calvinists. It made them aware of doctrinal differences already existing in the Presbyterian Church, with its varied background and

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<sup>1</sup>Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (ed.) Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), VI, 394-95.



ethnical composition.<sup>2</sup> Most of the supporters of the "new measures" were members of the "New School" wing of the Church, largely men with New England background and training. Added to this was the existence of "refined intellectual abstractions of the New Divinity" that came out of New Haven as advocated by Nathaniel Taylor of Yale University and Lyman Beecher.<sup>3</sup>

By 1835 the division between the New School -- the "new measure and new divinity men" -- and the Old School -- the orthodox Presbyterians -- had grown so bitter that separation seemed to many only a matter of method and scope. At the same time, as a result of the growing anti-slavery movement in the country, the existence of slave-holding in the membership of the Church was creating division and dissension. While attempts were being made to flood the South with abolitionist literature, the South had become a more reluctant field for the propaganda. They

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<sup>2</sup>W.G. McLoughlin, Modern Revivalism (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), 26ff. William W. Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 134-36. Frank G. Beardsley, A History of American Revivals (Boston: American Tract Society, 1904), 144-45. Gilbert H. Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844 (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1933), 15-16.

<sup>3</sup>Biblical Repertory and Theological Review, New Series; VII (October, 1835), 656-57. G.H. Barnes, op. cit., 6-7.

feared that it would incite insurrection.<sup>4</sup> This hardening of the resistance of the South was due to developments concerning human bondage that had taken place since the Presbyterian Church, with the full approval of the Southern representatives, in the General Assembly of 1818 had pronounced "voluntary" slavery "a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature" and "utterly inconsistent with the law of God" which required "all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day ... to use their honest, earnest and unwearied endeavors to correct the errors of former times, and as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery" ....<sup>5</sup>

Chief among the causes for the changing attitude in the South was the ever-present Southern dread of a servile insurrection, which had been resuscitated after a period of dormancy by the fiasco of Denmark Vesey at Charleston in 1820.<sup>6</sup> It had been aggravated by the

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<sup>4</sup>Leonard W. Bacon, A History of American Christianity, Vol. XIII in American Church History Series (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1897), 281.

<sup>5</sup>Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, 1818, p. 25. Hereafter referred to as Assembly Minutes.

<sup>6</sup>James T. Adams (ed.), Dictionary of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), V, 364.



publication of "Walker's Appeal" in 1829, and had been fanned to a white heat in 1831 by the Nat Turner insurrection during which sixty-one whites had been massacred.<sup>7</sup>

Another cause of the change in the 1830's was the rise of the new spirit of dynamic, aggressive abolitionism which was signalized by the publication of the first issue of the Liberator in 1831. The "Essay on Slavery" published in 1835 by William Ellery Channing, and the South Carolina Nullification struggle, along with the abolition of slavery in the British possessions in 1833, and its aftermath, which furnished convincing argument both for the opponents and exponents of abolition, were factors in the changing attitude.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand because of the expansion into the Southwest, domestic slave trade was becoming more profitable. The Virginia Times, in 1836, estimated slaves numbering 40,000 were exported from Virginia that year, in addition to 80,000 that were taken out of the state

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<sup>7</sup>Samuel J. May, Some Reflections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict (Boston: Fields and Osgood, 1869), 129. Bacon, op. cit., 279ff.

<sup>8</sup>For a detailed account of this period see: Henry H. Simms, Emotion at High Tide: Abolition As A Controversial Factor, 1830-1845 (Baltimore: Moore and Co., 1960), especially page 4.

by the owners.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Jefferson Randolph, speaking on the floor of the Virginia legislature in 1832, stated that Virginia had been converted into "one grand menagerie, where men are reared for the market like oxen for the shambles."<sup>10</sup>

During the summer of 1835, a series of meetings were held throughout the South for the purpose of exciting feelings against the abolitionists. Almost without exception the clergy took a prominent part. At Charleston "the clergy of all denominations attended in a body, lending their sanctions to the proceedings." A meeting at Clinton, Mississippi, resolved that the clergy should take a stand in the crisis; silence was a cause for "serious censure."<sup>11</sup> Uncontrolled emotion had swept through this community following the crushing of an insurrection planned for the fourth of July.<sup>12</sup> A meeting of clergy at Richmond, Virginia,

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<sup>9</sup>William H. Smith, A Political History of Slavery (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1903), I, 3. For a description of this trade see: F.L. Olmsted, A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), I, 55. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906), 123-30.

<sup>10</sup>Daniel Goodloe, The Southern Platform (Boston: J.P. Jewett & Co., 1858), 46.

<sup>11</sup>James G. Birney, American Churches, the Bulwarks of American Slavery (New York: Parker Pillsbury, 1885), 8.

<sup>12</sup>Simms, op. cit., 50, 74.



in July, 1835, considered the clergy unanimous in opposing pernicious schemes of abolitionists.<sup>13</sup> John Witherspoon of South Carolina, who was to be the moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1836, informed the Emancipator that the "remedy of Judge Lynch" was the South's treatment "for the malady of Northern fanaticism".<sup>14</sup> William Plumer, a Presbyterian minister of Virginia, felt that "if abolitionists will set the country in a blaze, it is but fair that they should receive the first warming of the fire." R. N. Anderson, another Presbyterian minister of Virginia, in a letter to the Presbytery of Hanover, advised that abolitionists should "be ferreted out, silenced, excommunicated, and left to the public to dispose of in other respects."<sup>15</sup> In 1836, Jeremiah Porter, Presbyterian missionary in Illinois, while writing about the difficulties of Elijah Lovejoy with his press, made the following observation: "I think the time is near when every faithful

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<sup>13</sup>Birney, op. cit., 9.

<sup>14</sup>William Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery (New York: W. Harned, 1852), 411.

<sup>15</sup>Birney, op. cit., 27, 33, 35. Goodell, op. cit., 411.

Presbyterian minister will be driven from the Slave States."<sup>16</sup>

Acts were reinforced by deeds. A. W. Kitchell, a Presbyterian minister of Georgia, was tarred and feathered, and ridden out of town on a rail merely on suspicion that he was an abolitionist.<sup>17</sup> In July, 1835, Amos Dresser, a student from Lane Seminary who was selling Bibles in Nashville, Tennessee, was seized by a vigilance committee and tried for having abolition documents in his possession. His penalty was twenty lashes.<sup>18</sup> He was convicted by a committee which included seven Presbyterian elders.<sup>19</sup>

But the problem of evangelism with its "new measures" and abolitionism were really two horns of the same

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<sup>16</sup>Jeremiah Porter, "Diary of Porter, Missionary for the Home Missionary Society, 1831-1848" (August 5, 1836). Microfilm in Wisconsin Historical Society Library; original manuscript at the University of Chicago.

<sup>17</sup>Dwight N. Harris, The History of Negro Servitude in Illinois and the Slavery Agitation in That State, 1719-1864 (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1904), 65. See Robert Ellis Thompson, A History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, VI, The American Church History Series (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1895), 122, for another incident.

<sup>18</sup>Amos Dresser, The Narrative of Amos Dresser (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 12-13. The narrative appears in the Cincinnati Gazette, August 15, 1835. See: Birney, op. cit., 7ff; Simms, op. cit., 73.

<sup>19</sup>Dresser, op. cit., 3-4.



dilemma. The interest in aiding the cause of the slave, along with other reform movements, has been called "the legitimate children of the revivalism."<sup>20</sup> After pointing to the reform movement as a product of the religious awakening, a recent scholar concluded: "There is no minimizing the genuine contribution which it made. Revivalists hoped to scour and purify the earth against the coming of the Messiah, and there was a thrilling urgency about the job."<sup>21</sup> Lyman Beecher called abolitionism "the offspring of the Oneida denunciatory revivals."<sup>22</sup> The principal anti-slavery Presbyterian newspaper, the New School New York Evangelist, was also one of the chief advocates of the new religious movement. It combined its efforts with Finney to promote this sentiment. Finney's lectures furnished one of the most popular attractions in

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<sup>20</sup>William W. Sweet, Revivalism in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1844), 159.

<sup>21</sup>Bernard A. Weisberger, They Gathered at the River (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1958), 152, 156.

<sup>22</sup>Lyman Beecher to William Beecher, July 15, 1835, in Autobiography, Correspondence, etc. of Lyman, D.D., edited by Charles Beecher (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), II, 345.

the Evangelist.<sup>23</sup> When Finney died in 1875, the New York Independent, in commenting on his life work, said of the anti-slavery movement that it "carried with it the men interested in the revival movement."<sup>24</sup> The Evangelist pointed to the union of the religious awakening and anti-slavery sentiment when it added to its mast head of 1831, then "Devoted to Revivals, Doctrinal Discussions, and Religious Intelligence" the additional caption of "Human Rights."<sup>25</sup> Finney recognized the necessary connection. "If abolition can be made an appendage [sic] of a general revival," he wrote, "all is well. I fear no other form of carrying this question will save our country or the liberty or soul of the slave."<sup>26</sup> Abolition could be spread across "the whole land in two years" if only "the public mind can be engrossed with the subject of salvation."<sup>27</sup> In 1833 he had attacked

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<sup>23</sup>McLoughlin, op. cit., 76, 109.

<sup>24</sup>August 26, 1875.

<sup>25</sup>January 2, 1837.

<sup>26</sup>Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (ed.), Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844 (2 vols., New York: 1934), Vol. I, 318-19, Charles G. Finney to Theodore Weld, July 21, 1836. Hereafter cited as Weld-Grimke Letters.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

the American Colonization Society for its failure to take a bold stand in favor of immediate emancipation.<sup>28</sup> But in Finney's system anti-slavery was to remain secondary to evangelism.<sup>29</sup> It was left to Theodore Weld and others that came under the influence of Finney.<sup>30</sup>

Much of the South was under the influence of the spirit of revivalism until it became obvious to many that the benevolent programs were challenging the very structure of Southern culture and society. The largest Presbyterian paper in the South was the Southern Religious Telegraph of Richmond, Virginia, a New School sheet. But it soon seemed that the new religious methods led to fanaticism, and, to the South, this meant abolitionism. After the General Assembly of 1837 cut off the four synods for doctrinal errors, a "Circular Epistle" was issued explaining the reasons why it was necessary to take this action. "One

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<sup>28</sup> Emancipator, June 25, 1833.

<sup>29</sup> Charles G. Finney, Memoirs (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1876), 324. Weld-Grimke Letters, I, 327-28, James A. Thome to Weld, August 6, 1836. Robert S. Fletcher, A History of Oberlin College from Its Foundation Through the Civil War (2 vols.; Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College, 1943), I, 144. McLoughlin, op. cit., 108. McLoughlin finds Finney's interest in anti-slavery coming not from his revivalism but from Joshua Leavitt, the Tappan brothers, and others who were following the lead of Garrison and the British Anti-Slavery Society.

<sup>30</sup> Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 15.



of the most formidable evils of the present crisis," instructed the Assembly, "is the wide-spread and ever restless spirit of Radicalism .... It has ... driven to extreme fanaticism the great cause of Revivals of Religion -- of Temperance -- and the Rights of Man."<sup>31</sup> Thomas Smyth of the Presbytery of Charleston, South Carolina, who was a member of the Old School Convention of 1837 which worked out the plan for the excising of the four "offending synods," considered the epistle to have been a condemnation of abolitionism.<sup>32</sup>

After the Assembly of 1837, the editor of the Charleston Observer, while speaking of the division said:<sup>33</sup>

Troubles do not often come alone; with equal stride errors in doctrine of a multiform character, irregularities in discipline indicating the peculiar traits of fanaticism, and abolitionism of slavery have been wedded together, and together have marched, till by their joint action they have nearly completed the destruction of the Christian intercourse which once obtained between the North and the South.

In 1834, a communication from North Carolina appeared

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<sup>31</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1837, p. 507.

<sup>32</sup>Letter to the South Carolina Charleston Observer, December 29, 1838.

<sup>33</sup>Charleston Observer, August 26, 1837.

in the New York Evangelist containing a complaint that a minister could not "enforce the law of love without being suspected of favoring emancipation."<sup>34</sup> In answer to an inquiry from the Presbytery of Champlain in 1836 about revivals, William Plumer of the Presbytery of East Hanover, Virginia warned them: "There is a sorcery in fanaticism that is most captivating .... When religious excitements make men vainglorious, and boastful, they are spurious. Nor can any confidence be placed in such as beget a spirit of fierceness and intolerant denunciation."<sup>35</sup> A correspondent to the Charleston Observer wrote that "the Spirit of the age" had adopted the maxim "that all men are created free and equal." It was "driving at a proposition to unsettle the existing state of our domestic relations."<sup>36</sup> The conservative New School paper, The Philadelphian, printed a letter that sounded "Alarms About Revivals", and warned against "the fanaticism" that was "noised abroad."<sup>37</sup> John Keep, a New Measures man of the Western Reserve and western New York, in answering the Journal and Telegraph of Hudson,

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<sup>34</sup>New York Evangelist, July 9, 1834.

<sup>35</sup>Letter to the Presbytery of Champlain, April 13, 1835, in Charleston Observer, April 15, 1836.

<sup>36</sup>January 23, 1836.

<sup>37</sup>New York Evangelist, May 18, 1833.

Ohio, informed the editor that if he meant "New Measures" resulted in "extravagance" and excessive enthusiasm he slandered these revivals by putting them down as the fruits of new measures." But he admitted things had occurred "which wisdom and prudence condemn."<sup>38</sup>

In 1829 the Synod of Indiana had asked the General Assembly to take strong action against human bondage.<sup>39</sup> The Synod of Illinois followed with a similar request in 1834,<sup>40</sup> and during the same year the Presbytery of Chillicothe called on the Assembly to bar all slaveholders from communion.<sup>41</sup> At the same time that the Assembly was being pressed for action on the Southern institution, a

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<sup>38</sup>New York Evangelist, October 12, 1833. John Keep was one of the principal anti-slavery advocates in the Western Reserve. See Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 39.

<sup>39</sup>Records of the Synod of Indiana, New School, I, 1826-1845, 18-19, 22.

<sup>40</sup>Records of the Synod of Illinois, New School, I, 1831-1855, 45. Cincinnati Journal, December 17, 1835.

<sup>41</sup>Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, John D. Shane Collection, 80888, "Memorial of the Presbytery of Chillicothe to the General Assembly," April, 1834. The Presbyterian form of church government consists of several levels of church courts. The session is the governing body of the congregation. All of the sessions within a district are united to form a presbytery. The presbyteries are combined to form a synod which usually follows state lines. The national Church body is called the General Assembly.



controversy was brewing concerning doctrine. But while the division of the Church in the name of doctrine was only three years away, much more concern was expressed about the slavery question.<sup>42</sup> Although the embryo of the principles of the "Act and Testimony," which proposed to abrogate the Plan of Union and charged doctrinal errors, took form in rural Ohio near Cincinnati in 1834, the New School sheet, the Cincinnati Journal, was concerned only about the graveness of the emancipation controversy.<sup>43</sup> An earlier issue of the New York Evangelist mentioned the "Act and Testimony" as a petition that would be laid before the Assembly of 1834, but slavery would be "more difficult."<sup>44</sup> The Old School Presbytery of Chillicothe answered the "Act and Testimony" of

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<sup>42</sup>See: C. Bruce Staiger, "Abolitionism and the Presbyterian Church Schism, 1837-1838," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVI (December, 1949), 391-414. Elwyn A. Smith, "The Role of the South in the Presbyterian Schism of 1837-1838," Church History (March, 1960), 44-61. Staiger concludes that "if it had not been for the developments concerning slavery in the Assemblies of 1835 and 1836, the break would never have occurred," p. 39. Smith says "the slavery-abolition issue did not cause the schism; but the South played a role of the utmost significance by giving the Old School the victory and assuring the continuance of a non-sectional Presbyterian denomination until the out-break of the Civil War." (p. 60).

<sup>43</sup>Cincinnati Journal, August 29, 1834. New York Evangelist, September 20, 1834.

<sup>44</sup>New York Evangelist, April 5, 1834.

Philadelphia, May 26, 1834, with a challenge that it was questionable "whether the advocates of any of the heresies enumerated in 'The Act and Testimony' have done as much towards bringing the Word of God into disrepute .... as Presbyterians have done, in their efforts to make the Bible justify the sin of slaveholding."<sup>45</sup> Thus, in 1834 the controversy over human bondage was a grave problem while the dispute over doctrine occupied a secondary position of concern in church circles at least outside of Philadelphia.

In 1835 the Synod of Western Reserve declared slavery "a sin against God, a high-handed trespass on the rights of man."<sup>46</sup> In Michigan, declarations concerning slavery were adopted by the Presbyteries of Monroe and St. Joseph; and the Synod of Michigan unanimously declared that holding man as property should "cease immediately."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>R.C. Galbraith, The History of the Chillicothe Presbytery, From Its Organization in 1799 to 1889 (Scioto Gazette Book and Job Co., Cincinnati, 1889), 128.

<sup>46</sup>Ohio Observer, November 5, 1835; Action on slavery was also taken in several judicatories in the Synod of Western Reserve. See Records of the Presbyteries of: Trumbull, I, 1827-1847, (September 3, 1835), 221-25; Cleveland, I, 1830-1849 (September, 1835), 142. Liberator, July 11, 1835: the Church of Austinburg, Presbytery of Grand River, denied slave-holders communion.

<sup>47</sup>Charles Noble, Thirty-Third Anniversary of the Monroe Presbytery (Monroe, Michigan: E.G. Morton, 1868), 5. Records of the Presbytery of St. Joseph, 1833-1848 (September, 1835), 17. Records of the Synod of Michigan, I, 1831-1851, (October, 1835), 33. Cincinnati Journal, December 17, 1835.

Several judicatories in the Northwest felt that the "sin" of human bondage should subject the perpetrators to the discipline of the church.<sup>48</sup> In western New York, the Synod of Utica adopted strong resolutions against involuntary servitude.<sup>49</sup> Since the General Assembly of 1834 had rejected the petitions, in the South only the Presbytery of South Carolina felt called upon to condemn the support of abolitionism in some of the lower judicatories.<sup>50</sup> The "Act and Testimony" was largely disregarded, but the Presbytery of Fayetteville, North Carolina, warned its members to avoid any connection with the meeting on doctrinal errors that was to be held in Pittsburgh to consider the "Act and Testimony".<sup>51</sup>

In the General Assembly of 1835, the abolitionists were well represented. While there were reported to have

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<sup>48</sup>This position was taken by the Presbyteries of Indianapolis, Chillicothe, and the Synod of Illinois. See Records of the Presbytery of Indianapolis, I, 1831-1837, 219. Records of the Synod of Illinois, I, 1831-1855, 64. Cincinnati Journal, May 8, June 12, 1835. New York Evangelist, June 6, 1835. Galbraith, op. cit., 130.

<sup>49</sup>New York Evangelist, June 6, 1835.

<sup>50</sup>Boston Recorder, May 22, 1835.

<sup>51</sup>New York Evangelist, May 2, 1835.



been only two known abolitionists in the Assembly of 1834, Theodore Weld, a representative of the American Anti-Slavery Society, found one-fourth of the commissioners in the ranks of this body in 1835. Another agent said it looked "as if the Presbyterian Church were becoming an abolitionist society."<sup>52</sup> But the conservatives dominated the Assembly. The anti-slavery memorials were referred to a committee, four-fifths of which, Garrison observed, were from the South.<sup>53</sup> The report was rejected by the house and an interim committee was appointed to report on slavery in 1836.<sup>54</sup> After the Assembly of 1835, the condemnation of abolitionism was general throughout the South and the right

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<sup>52</sup>Emancipator, June 15, 1835. Weld to Elizur Wright, June 6, 1835, Weld-Grimké Letters, I, 224, 243-44. Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 94.

<sup>53</sup>W.P. Garrison and F.J. Garrison, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879 (2 vols.; New York: Century Co., 1885-1889), I, 478. Assembly Minutes, 1835, 472. The members were: Samuel D. Williamson, Presbytery of Winchester, Virginia; Thomas Clelland, Presbytery of Transylvania, Kentucky; Allen Gallaher, Presbytery of St. Charles, Missouri; James Hoge, Presbytery of Columbus, Ohio, but born and reared in Virginia; Thomas Elmes, not identified.

<sup>54</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1835, 490.

of the Assembly to interfere with slavery was questioned.<sup>55</sup>  
 The Presbytery of Georgia "earnestly beseeched" the next  
 Assembly "to beware what they do, lest they bring about,  
 "in the church, the separation of the north from the  
 south."<sup>56</sup> The Synod of North Carolina had not considered  
 the doctrinal controversy important enough to send delegates  
 to the Old School Convention of 1835,<sup>57</sup> but now the Synod  
 viewed the work of the abolitionists as "tending to in-  
 terrupt or destroy all friendly intercourse between the  
 different sections of the union."<sup>58</sup> The Synod of Virginia

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<sup>55</sup>The following judicatories took this general  
 stand: Synod of Georgia and South Carolina, Southern  
 Religious Telegraph, October 9, 1835; Presbytery of  
 Charleston Union, Charleston Observer, November 14, 1835;  
 Synod of Alabama, Charleston Observer, November 21, 1835;  
 Presbytery of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Walter B. Posey, The  
 Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778-1838  
 (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1952), 80-81, citing  
 Minutes of the Presbytery of Tuscaloosa, 1835-1843; Synod  
 of West Tennessee, 1826-1849, Presbyterian Foundation,  
 Montreat, North Carolina; Synod of Mississippi, citing  
New Orleans Observer, December 12, 1835.

<sup>56</sup>Charleston Observer, November 14, 1835. New York  
 Observer, December 5, 1835.

<sup>57</sup>William H. Foote, Sketches of Virginia, Histori-  
 cal and Biographical (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott, 1855),  
 Series II, 504.

<sup>58</sup>Cincinnati Journal, December 10, 1835.

had failed to support the "Act and Testimony" in 1835, and did not send delegates to the Convention of that year. Its delegates consistently voted in support of the New School measures, but in the fall of 1835 Virginia passed strong measures opposing abolitionists.<sup>59</sup>

In the East, the Synod of Philadelphia condemned abolitionists as "agitators of the public mind" who were "endangering the integrity of the American union, and the unity of the Presbyterian Church."<sup>60</sup> This "Narrative on the State of Religion" was written by John Breckinridge,<sup>61</sup> who was to take a lead in the excising of the four synods for doctrinal fallacies. The Presbyterian of Philadelphia printed an article from the Philadelphia Inquirer concerning intelligence from Richmond, Virginia. The article made the point that abolitionists had set back the cause of emancipation which was making great headway before their

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<sup>59</sup> Foote, op. cit., 504. Assembly Minutes, 1835, 431-35. Cincinnati Journal, December 10, 1835.

<sup>60</sup> Cincinnati Journal, December 10, 1835.

<sup>61</sup> Presbyterian, November 19, 1835. It was charged before the Presbytery of Huntingdon by an abolitionist member of the Synod that the paper had been passed by a "small portion of the Synod at the dead of the last night of the session," (Emancipator, September 29, 1836).



interference.<sup>62</sup> As early as 1833 the New York Evangelist had observed the excitement in the East "at the bare proposal of discussing the slavery question,"<sup>63</sup> and by 1835 a rumor was circulating among the conservatives of the East that the New School planned to gain ascendancy by forcing the slaveholders out of the church. "In this way," John Moody of the Presbytery of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, wrote confidentially to Joshua Wilson of Cincinnati, the reformers would "gain a majority in the Assembly."<sup>64</sup>

In western New York in the fall of 1835, the Presbytery of Genesee and the Synod of Utica adopted declarations against human bondage.<sup>65</sup> In the Middle West more

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<sup>62</sup>Presbyterian, November 26, 1835.

<sup>63</sup>New York Evangelist, November 23, 1833.

<sup>64</sup>Joshua L. Wilson Papers (Manuscript: University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois) VI, John Moody to Joshua L. Wilson, September 8, 1835.

<sup>65</sup>New York Observer, October 10, 1835. Zebulon Crocker, The Catastrophe of the Presbyterian Church in 1837 (New Haven: B. and W. Noyes, 1838), 65-66. Liberator, October 10, 1835. New York Evangelist, October 20, 1835.

drastic action was taken.<sup>66</sup> Chillicothe sent the nine resolutions adopted earlier to all presbyteries, and suggested joint action against slavery.<sup>67</sup> The Synod of Cincinnati passed resolutions denying communion to slaveholders, and straight way voted to remove Joseph C. Harrison, who occupied this status, from a church within its bounds.<sup>68</sup> In November of 1835, the New York Evangelist said, "The recent agitations have brought the true question to light. Is Slavery Sin? -- on this the whole matter turns, and here ... the Presbyterian Churches are to be tried and perhaps divided asunder."<sup>69</sup>

During the spring meetings of 1836, the judicatories

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<sup>66</sup>Records of the Synod of Ohio, Old School, 1828-1856, II, 94. John Robinson, The Testimony and Practice of the Presbyterian Church in Reference to American Slavery (Cincinnati: John D. Thorpe, 1852), 48-49. Crocker, op. cit., 66. Action was taken by the Presbyteries of Detroit and Portage during the autumn of 1835 and spring of 1836. See Records of the Presbytery of Portage, 1818-1843, III, 59; Records of the Presbytery of Detroit, 1828-1840, I, 116, 178-79.

<sup>67</sup>Joshua L. Wilson Papers, VI, Letter from the Presbytery of Chillicothe to the Presbytery of Cincinnati, December 24, 1835.

<sup>68</sup>Cincinnati Journal, December 17, 1835. Southern Religious Telegraph, January 8, 1836. See Records of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, New School, 1835-1843, I, 13, 188; Philadelphian, January 14, 1836; Wilson Papers, VI, Joseph C. Harrison to Wilson, November 4, 1835.

<sup>69</sup>New York Evangelist, November 21, 1835.

of the South moved to a more determined position. Slavery was pronounced a civil institution over which the Church had no authority. Commissioners were instructed to withdraw if action were taken on the question of human bondage or to consult with other Southern delegates as to the course to be pursued.<sup>70</sup>

The Southern Presbyterian religious journals had already set the pace for the South. A correspondent to the Southern Christian Herald advised: the South "ought no longer to suffer our feelings to be harassed and our Christian integrity questioned by fanatics." The editor added, "There is nothing that we believe more firmly than that the Subject of slavery will divide the General Assembly." Secession was preferred to angry debate.<sup>71</sup> The next issue of the Charleston Observer printed this letter and echoed the opinion that "the next General Assembly ... will be the last."<sup>72</sup> After the presbyteries

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<sup>70</sup>Presbytery of Charleston Union, New York Observer, April 23, 1836; Cincinnati Journal, April 28, 1836. Presbytery of Hopewell, Georgia, Charleston Observer, April 16, 1836; Southern Religious Telegraph, May 6, 1836; Liberator, June 11, 1836; New York Observer, April 30, 1836; Birney, American Churches, 38. Presbytery of Lexington, Virginia, Southern Religious Telegraph, May 27, 1836. Synod of Virginia, Cincinnati Journal, June 8, 1836; St. Louis Observer, June 23, 1836.

<sup>71</sup>Southern Christian Herald, (Columbia, South Carolina), February 3, 1836.

<sup>72</sup>Charleston Observer, February 13, 1836.



had adopted the advanced position in the spring of 1836, the Southern Religious Telegraph observed that these sentiments expressed "the views and principles that prevail ... in all our churches."<sup>73</sup> This unity had been secured "without concert," added the Charleston Observer. "Both parties will make an effort to secure the cooperation of our Southern delegates on other questions than those which we are most deeply interested by holding out such expectations as will not be fully realized in the event of giving those questions priority," continued the editor.<sup>74</sup> "Gradualism was no better than immediatism," warned the Charleston Observer.<sup>75</sup> A correspondent followed with fifteen reasons why the South should withdraw; all concerned slavery; doctrine was not mentioned.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>New York Evangelist, April 30, 1836.

<sup>74</sup>Charleston Observer, April 23, 1836. The New York Evangelist saw evidence that "the Philadelphia Party" and the "Slavery Party" would "coalesce on the logrolling principles, and by elective affinity." (Presbyterian, April 30, 1836; New York Evangelist, April 30, 1836.)

<sup>75</sup>Cited by Cincinnati Journal, April 28, 1863. The Southern Religious Telegraph, printed this with apparent approval, April 8, 1836.

<sup>76</sup>New York Evangelist, May 28, 1836. The Philadelphian concluded that the Southern press, because of slavery, was sounding the alarm for a war on the Assembly. (March 3, 1836.)

The Buffalo Spectator, speaking for the New England party, called for an end to "ecclesiastical hostilities" so the Church could devote itself to "the promotion of truth and righteousness."<sup>77</sup> The Philadelphian optimistically observed that "fears and surmises once were entertained that New School and Anti-Slavery, Old School and pro-slavery would form the dividing line. But such apprehensions are groundless. Some of the fiercest opposers of Slavery are Old School men."<sup>78</sup> "Nothing," said the Western Presbyterian Herald, a spokesman for conservatives at Louisville "could be more unfortunate than divided counsels among orthodox Presbyterians at the present crisis."<sup>79</sup> The Boston Recorder, looking on from the side-line, pointed to the difficulty of finding a dividing line. "In order to answer the purposes, it must run through the midst of Synods, Presbyteries, churches, families, dividing the Old

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<sup>77</sup>Philadelphian, February 25, 1836.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., March 3, 1836.

<sup>79</sup>Cited by the Presbyterian, February 18, 1837.

School members from the New, and the abolitionists from their opponents."<sup>80</sup>

But the optimists of the New School had counted on the neutrality of the Princeton Biblical Repertory. Formerly occupying a moderate position in the doctrinal dispute, it now echoed the sentiments of the South by declaring that "slaveholding is not necessarily sinful." The opinion that "slaveholding is itself a crime must operate to produce the division of all ecclesiastical bodies .... Christ and His Apostles never denounced slaveholding as a crime."<sup>81</sup> Elijah Lovejoy was later to charge that the Repertory had granted divine sanction for slaveholding.<sup>82</sup>

A reprint of the article was circulated among the members of the General Assembly of 1836.<sup>83</sup> In the South the Repertory was given credit for changing the northern judicatories from Anti-slavery to theoretical pro-slavery men.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Cited in the Philadelphia Observer, November 10, 1836.

<sup>81</sup>Biblical Repertory, VIII, No 2 (April, 1836), 277, 279, 301.

<sup>82</sup>Emancipator, August 24, 1837, quoting the Alton Observer.

<sup>83</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, June 17, 1836.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., September 8, 1837.



This article was written by Charles Hodge, a professor at Princeton, who was to take a prominent part in the doctrinal division.<sup>85</sup> This was a radical departure from the position of the Repertory in 1833 when it printed Robert J. Breckinridge's unsigned article on abolition in which the position was taken "that slavery was criminal" and "it ought, therefore for this and a thousand other reasons, to be abolished."<sup>86</sup> Although the Repertory had opposed the "Acts and Testimony" in 1834,<sup>87</sup> a year later it was to discover that a union had taken place "between the coarse bustling fanaticism of the New Measures and the refined intellectual abstractions of the New Divinity."<sup>88</sup> This discovery was reflected in the changing attitude toward the Southern institution. A correspondent to the

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<sup>85</sup>Cincinnati Journal, July 5, 1838. In a letter to the Presbytery of Chillicothe, John Rankin says Samuel Miller told him he wrote the articles. A.A. Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), 464. Charles Hodge to J.C. Backus, December 28, 1860.

<sup>86</sup>Biblical Repertory, V, No. 3 (July, 1833), 298.

<sup>87</sup>Philadelphian, October 23, 1834.

<sup>88</sup>Biblical Repertory, VII (October, 1835), 656.

Presbyterian warned that the New England party was determined to press the question of human bondage. This would leave the "orthodox brethren in the embrace of a New School majority." For what other reason did the reformers "deprecate controversy and division on account of the great doctrine of the Bible, and yet agitate, and invite, and provoke controversy and division on the subject of slavery?"<sup>89</sup> The Christian Herald echoed a warning that Southern secession would leave the northern "orthodox" in a decided minority, so that the triumph of heresy would be "more complete and probably final."<sup>90</sup>

In the heart of the conservative country, the Presbytery of Carlisle, Pennsylvania, sent out a "Pastoral Letter" which warned against division. Citing Corinthians I, 3, it quoted a passage: "'There is among you envying and strife, and division, are ye not carnal ...?' There is no temper of mind against which Christians ought more incessantly to be on their guard than the one just named."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Presbyterian, April 23, 1836.

<sup>90</sup>Pittsburgh Christian Herald, March 11, April 1, 1836.

<sup>91</sup>Presbyterian, May 7, 1836.

But with the passage of six months, and with assurance that division would come along doctrinal lines instead of because of slavery, the judicatory did an about face. "It is our firm conviction," resolved the Presbytery, "that there are ministers connected with the General Assembly who hold error" and "they ought to be separated from us." They called for an orthodox Convention similar to that of 1835.<sup>92</sup> In New Jersey, the New School Presbytery of Montrose adopted strong resolutions against slavery,<sup>93</sup> while the conservative Presbytery of New Brunswick declared slavery "a civil and not an ecclesiastical relation" with which the church had "no right to interfere."<sup>94</sup> The Synod of New Jersey, dominated by the Old School, approved the position of New Brunswick but refused to approve the action of Montrose.<sup>95</sup> The First Presbytery of New York found it "highly inexpedient for the next General Assembly ... to adopt any measure whatever touching the question of

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., October 22, 1836.

<sup>93</sup>New York Evangelist, May 28, 1836.

<sup>94</sup>Presbyterian, May 7, 1836.

<sup>95</sup>Records of the Synod of New Jersey, 1835-1847 (October 30, 1836), 7.



slavery." At the same time it defeated a move to have the Assembly drop the charge of doctrinal error against Albert Barnes, a New School man.<sup>96</sup> Before the Assembly of 1836, the Presbyterian returned with a final warning making the position of the South clear: Discussion of slavery was contrary to "the example and teachings of Christ and his Apostles .... It is impossible to enter the subject without immediately interfering with the politics of the land."<sup>97</sup>

Following the selection by the Assembly in 1835 of the interim committee on slavery, the chairman, Samuel Miller, drew up a series of resolutions and mailed them to the other committee members. John Witherspoon of Camden, South Carolina, responded in conciliatory language. Later in the year he wrote, "The spirit of hostility to any action by the Assembly ... has greatly increased .... It will require great prudence to prevent a division. No report based on compromise will answer."<sup>98</sup> James Hoge, a committee member, wrote from Columbus, Ohio, "It would be best to make no report." If the question was agitated the whole Southern

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<sup>96</sup> Presbyterian, April 30, 1836.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., May 14, 1836.

<sup>98</sup> Samuel Miller, The Life of Samuel Miller (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1869), II, 295-96.

delegation would probably "rise up as one man and leave the Assembly," warned Hoge.<sup>99</sup>

When the Assembly of 1836 met, the majority of the committee on slavery reported that it was "not expedient to take any further order in relation to this subject." A Minority report was made by James Dickey of Chillicothe. It confirmed the action of 1818 and called on the Assembly to work to abolish slavery.<sup>100</sup> The question was set aside in order to take up the case of Albert Barnes. Only one Southern delegate voted for postponement,<sup>101</sup> and the delegates from the Presbyteries of East and West Hanover with several others walked out of the Assembly.<sup>102</sup> John Witherspoon, moderator of the Assembly, in a series of unsigned letters to the Charleston Observer, gave his views concerning developments. "I can see nothing to save the church from a division," he said shortly after the Assembly

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<sup>99</sup>Miller, op. cit., 296-97.

<sup>100</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1836, 248-50.

<sup>101</sup>Louisa C. Stoney (ed.), Autobiographical Notes and Reflections by Thomas Smyth (Charleston, South Carolina: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell Co., 1914), 157.

<sup>102</sup>Goodell, op. cit., 154-55; New York Evangelist, December 12, 1840.

was organized.<sup>103</sup> "The house is divided, and I fear cannot stand," said a correspondent to the Southern Religious Telegraph.<sup>104</sup> The Cincinnati Journal saw the Assembly as "secretly heaving toward a rupture."<sup>105</sup> Already it was reported "a strong bill was in the hands of a committee to dissolve the General Assembly."<sup>106</sup> "The crisis is tremendous," agreed the New York Journal of Commerce.<sup>107</sup> "I hope that such another Assembly will never meet but once again: and then only ... to separate," said a correspondent to the Southern Religious Telegraph.<sup>108</sup>

The Southern delegates held a caucus as planned. "Fanaticism of the wildest and most reckless character abound in the body," wrote George Payne of West Hanover, but a convention of Southern delegates had passed resolutions

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<sup>103</sup>Charleston Observer, June 11, 1836. The same letters addressed to Thomas Smyth appeared in Smyth's Autobiographical Notes, Letters and Reflections, 155-58.

<sup>104</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, June 10, 1836.

<sup>105</sup>Cincinnati Journal, June 9, 1836.

<sup>106</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, June 10, 1836.

<sup>107</sup>Liberator, June 18, 1836.

<sup>108</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, June 24, 1836.  
Foote, op. cit., 505-506.



that they would decline the authority of the Assembly if action were taken on the Southern institution. They drew up resolutions to substitute for those before the house.<sup>109</sup>

The Philanthropist reported that the "clerical caucus" aimed "to rivet the chains of the slave .... Is this slave holding Christianity? What mockery!"<sup>110</sup> The Southern resolutions were presented by John McElhenny of the Presbytery of Lexington, Virginia. The "General Assembly have no authority to assume or exercise jurisdiction," concluded the resolution. While it was under consideration, James Hoge introduced a resolution postponing consideration of the slavery question. Hoge's resolution was preceded by a preamble to the effect that the Church ought not to assume jurisdiction binding the "conscience." These were adopted as separate measures.<sup>111</sup>

On the afternoon that the Assembly adjourned, the orthodox commissioners had a conference and a policy of separation or division was the decision. After this meeting,

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<sup>109</sup>Charleston Observer, June 11, 1836. Birney, op. cit., The American Churches, 36. Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society (New York: 1837), 66-67. New York Evangelist, December 12, 1840.

<sup>110</sup>Philanthropist, July 15, 1836.

<sup>111</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1836, 271-72. New York Observer, June 4, 1836. New York Evangelist, June 4, 1836.

John Witherspoon is said to have remarked: "The die is cast: the church is to be divided."<sup>112</sup> In September a special committee of ten members issued a "Circular on Errors."<sup>113</sup> In January and again in March of 1837, this same group issued a call for an orthodox convention for the purpose of putting "an end to those contentions, which have for years agitated our church, by removing the causes in which they originate."<sup>114</sup> The committee was made up of members from the East. Committee members John M. Krebs, and W.W. Phillips, of the First Presbytery of New York, had voted for the resolutions that their judicatory had adopted in April, 1836, to the effect that "interference with the prosperity of the whole south was more to be deplored by an evangelical spirit than the present existence of slavery."<sup>115</sup> Hugh Auschincloss, another committee member,

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<sup>112</sup>Ezra H. Gillett, A History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, 1864), II, 469, note. Staiger, loc. cit., 402. Following this meeting, Witherspoon wrote Lyman Beecher that "it needs but the lifting of a finger" to bring division about, and "if it will promote the peace of the church, it shall be done." Charles Beecher, Autobiography, Correspondence, etc. of Lyman Beecher (2 vols., New York: Harper and Brothers, 1865), II, 428.

<sup>113</sup>Presbyterian, September 17, 1836. Southern Religious Telegraph, September 25, 1836.

<sup>114</sup>Presbyterian, January 21, March 11, 1837. See Cincinnati Journal, September 19, 1836.

<sup>115</sup>Presbyterian, April 30, 1836.

was present at the Presbytery meeting but apparently left before the vote was taken. Two others, James Elroy and James Lenox, along with Phillips, were signers of the protest against the removal of a phrase from the report adopted by the Assembly of 1836. This deletion declared many of the abolitionist memorials and speeches to be "highly abusive and disorderly."<sup>116</sup> George Potts, also one of the committee, was a member of the Board of Trustees which had recently transferred over \$130,000 of the Church's funds from northern to southern securities.<sup>117</sup> This was invested in Southwestern banks where the unprecedented briskness of domestic slave trade offered profitable returns.<sup>118</sup> "It would hardly seem prudent," concluded Bruce Staiger, "to agitate for abolition of the very institution upon which Southern prosperity depended."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>New York Observer, June 18, 1836. Not a single signer of the protest against the deletion was from the West.

<sup>117</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1836, 305-307; 1837, 517. In 1835 approximately \$96,000 was transferred from northern investments to southern bank stock paying 8% to 10% interest, and "Yielding an increase of annual income of \$2,660." In 1836, \$25,000 more was transferred, and in 1837, still more.

<sup>118</sup>Goodell, op. cit., 154.

<sup>119</sup>Staiger, loc. cit., 403. See Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 154, note.



Another member, John Breckinridge, was the author of the Declaration of the Synod of Philadelphia condemning abolitionism,<sup>120</sup> and the son-in-law of Samuel Miller, who was taking an active part in appeasing the South and purging the Church of the four synods on doctrinal grounds. Breckinridge was to issue still another attack on abolitionism with which he associated New Schoolism.<sup>121</sup> In the fall of 1837 after the separation, still another member, Francis Mc Farland, who was Secretary of the Board of Education, attended a meeting of the Synod of Virginia. He spoke there of the "disorders" in the excinded synods. A correspondent to the Philadelphia Observer wrote: "The statement of Mr. M'Farland ... had great influence" and many had voted to sustain the Assembly because of his statement. "Much of the feeling now existing in Virginia on the subject of slavery is to be traced wholly to the belief that by sustaining the action of the Assembly, they shall rid themselves of the Anti-slavery influence of the North."<sup>122</sup>

After the Assembly of 1836, it was a foregone

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<sup>120</sup> See footnote No. 61, page 19.

<sup>121</sup> Presbyterian, April 8, 1837.

<sup>122</sup> Philadelphia Observer, November 23, 1837.

conclusion in the South that some--solution must be found to remove the dissension in the church over human bondage.

The end was agreed on, the debate proceeded concerning the means. A correspondent to the Southern Religious Telegraph concluded that the next meeting of the Assembly should be for the purpose of separation, so that the South would be free of "the scoffs and taunts ... and excommunications and maledictions of the Abolitionists."<sup>123</sup>

An answer to this letter maintained that a separation should not come until "it be ascertained whether the northern church will not yeild the ground, that slavery is not, in itself sinful."<sup>124</sup> The Charleston Observer remarked that the South was united in doctrine and in respect to "local institutions." Geographic division, however, would make abolitionism "more rife" and "more extended" for "vindicators beyond the separating line would be fewer than they now are."<sup>125</sup> The Southern Religious Telegraph, a paper supporting

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<sup>123</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, June 24, 1836. Charleston Observer, July 2, 1836. New York Evangelist, July 16, 1836.

<sup>124</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, July 8, 1836.

<sup>125</sup>Charleston Observer, July 2, 1836. Southern Christian Herald, July 29, 1846. The New York Evangelist maintained that the record showed the South was not so united in the Assembly of 1836. See the issue of July 16, 1836.

the doctrinal liberals, favored a geographical division.<sup>126</sup>  
 The Presbyterian answered that the New School, North and South, was trying to secure a sectional separation. "Let the orthodox in their united strength oppose the enemies of our church," it continued, "and in case of a division let them constitute one party; subsequent arrangements could then be made which would be mutually satisfactory both to the South and the North."<sup>127</sup> A correspondent, signed "Baxter," agreed with the suggestion for "arrangements." "So long as our orthodox brethren at the north let the subject of slavery alone, we have no right to separate from them .... I believe there must be a division," he added, but it "must be upon doctrine and discipline."<sup>128</sup> The Southern Christian Herald concurred, agreeing with the Presbyterian and the Charleston Observer that a geographic division would increase abolitionist activity at the North.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>Cited in the New York Evangelist, July 16, 1836.

<sup>127</sup>Presbyterian, July 23, 1836.

<sup>128</sup>Southern Christian Herald, July 29, 1836.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid.; Presbyterian, July 23, 1836.



A correspondent to the Nashville American Presbyterian observed that an orthodox Assembly could be formed "with scarcely a spice of abolitionism .... It is a matter of gratification ... to know that by delivering ourselves from new schoolism we also get clear of abolitionism."<sup>130</sup>

During the autumn of 1836, the Southern judicatory maintained the position that slavery was a civil institution over which the Church had no authority. They stood determined to withdraw if the subject were discussed, but they now took up the cause of doctrine.<sup>131</sup> The Synod of North Carolina denounced human bondage but also defended doctrine. The

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<sup>130</sup>Presbyterian, October 7, 1836; Southern Religious Telegraph, October 7, 1836.

<sup>131</sup>Action was taken in this vein by the following judicatories: Presbytery of Harmony, South Carolina, Charleston Observer, November 12, 1836; The Friend of Man, November 8, 1836. Synod of South Carolina and Georgia, Charleston Observer, December 10, 1836. Presbytery of Charleston Union, Charleston Observer, November 26, 1836. Presbytery of Bethel, North Carolina, Presbyterian, November 19, 1836. Presbytery of Concord, North Carolina, Charleston Observer, November 5, 1836; Foote, op. cit., 506. Synod of North Carolina, New York Observer, December 10, 1836. Presbytery of West Lexington, Kentucky, Southern Religious Telegraph, November 4, 1836. Presbytery of West Hanover, Virginia, Southern Religious Telegraph, November 11, 1836. Synod of Virginia, Southern Religious Telegraph, November 7, 1836. Presbytery of South Carolina, Southern Christian Herald, October 28, 1836.

Synod had not considered the doctrinal controversy important enough to send delegates to the convention of 1835, but in the autumn of 1836 it emerged as the stalwart defender of the true doctrine.<sup>132</sup> Although Virginia had failed to support the "Act and Testimony," or to send delegates to the convention of 1835,<sup>133</sup> and its commissioners voted persistently in support of the New School measures in the Assembly of 1836,<sup>134</sup> it now voted unanimously for the "Act of the Virginia Synod" which combined abolitionism and doctrinal soundness in a series of measures on heresies.<sup>135</sup> In December, 1836, a correspondent who was a member of the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia informed the Presbyterian that all the South was no conservative.<sup>136</sup> By April, 1837,

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<sup>132</sup>New York Observer, December 10, 1836. Foote, op. cit., 504.

<sup>133</sup>Foote, op. cit., 504.

<sup>134</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1789-1835, 431-35.

<sup>135</sup>New York Observer, November 26, 1836.

<sup>136</sup>Presbyterian, December 17, 1836.

the editor observed that "a prodigious reaction had swept the South." This section would "act harmoniously and energetically with the Old School brethren," he concluded.<sup>137</sup> The Charleston Observer and the Southern Christian Herald had come out for united action through a convention.<sup>138</sup>

In the autumn of 1836 and the spring of 1837, the number of resolutions and prayer concerts in opposition to slavery increased in the judicatories of western New York.<sup>139</sup> In the Middle West drastic measures were adopted to remove slavery from the Presbyterian Church.<sup>140</sup> The

<sup>137</sup>Presbyterian, April 15, 1837.

<sup>138</sup>Presbyterian, February 18, 1837.

<sup>139</sup>Resolutions were adopted by the following judicatories: Synod of Geneva, New York Evangelist, November 5, 1836, Presbytery of Londonderry, New York Evangelist, June 17, 1837, Presbytery of Otsego, Liberator, June 2, 1837; Presbytery of Genesee and Presbytery of Buffalo, Liberator, March 31, 1837; Presbytery of Ontario, New York Observer, March 4, 1837; Presbytery of Delaware, New York, the Presbytery of Angelica, and the Presbytery of Montrose, New York Evangelist, June 10, 1837.

<sup>140</sup>The following judicatories took action in opposition to slavery: Presbytery of Ottawa, Illinois: Nathum Gould, "Manuscript History of the Ottawa Presbytery" (Virginia Library, McCormick Theological Seminary), 21. Presbytery of Palestine, and the Presbytery of Alton, Illinois: Theodore Norton, History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Illinois (2 vols.; St. Louis: W.S. Bryan, 1879), I, 245-46; Records of the Presbytery of Alton,



Presbytery of Ottawa, Illinois felt that the holding of men as property ought to be "immediately repented," and the Synod of Illinois ruled that slaveholders who treated men as property should be denied fellowship.<sup>141</sup> The Presbyteries of Salem, Indiana, and Chillicothe, Grand River, and Cincinnati, Ohio, felt that slaveholders should be denied communion in the Church, and acted accordingly. In its ruling that ministers could be questioned to determine their views on slavery, Cincinnati was sustained by the Synod which followed this up by requesting that all judicatories under its charge concur in petitioning the Assembly

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1836-1850, 16; New York Evangelist, June 10, 1837, Presbytery of Trumbull, Ohio; Liberator, October 29, 1836. Records of the Presbytery of Grand River, Ohio, 1836-1849, II, 24. Presbytery of Medina, Ohio: New York Evangelist, June 10, 1837. Records of the Presbytery of Salem, Indiana New School, 1824-1840, I, 236; Cincinnati Journal, May 11, 1837; New York Evangelist, June 10, 1837. Presbytery of Chillicothe, Ohio; Galbraith, op. cit., 138. Presbytery of Cincinnati and the Synod of Ohio: Cincinnati Journal, November 17, 1836; New York Observer, December 10, 1836; Emancipator, November 17, 1836. Records of the Synod of Ohio, Old School, 1828-1856, II, 107. Records of the Presbytery of Detroit, 1828-1840, I, 230-34. Records of the Synod of Michigan, 1835-1841, I, 50. Records of the Presbytery of Detroit, 1828-1840, I, 230.

<sup>141</sup>Gould, op. cit., 21. Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855, New School, 85.

to declare "unworthy of the fellowship of the church" all who were guilty of oppression.<sup>142</sup> In contrast the Presbyteries of Richland, Ohio, and Blairsville, Pennsylvania, refused to take action concerning the Southern institution since it would not serve a good purpose.<sup>143</sup>

Before the Convention and the Assembly of 1837, added assurances were given of the soundness of the Old School on slavery. The moderates of Princeton took their stand with the conservatives of the East. In August, 1836, a letter from Archibald Alexander, a professor at Princeton, to C. C. Jones of the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia was made public. Alexander assured the South that christianizing the Negroes did not alter their status as slaves or destroy "the right of selling them again at pleasure."<sup>144</sup> In April, 1837, John Breckinridge, soon to become a professor at Princeton, addressed a letter to the

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<sup>142</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Grand River, 1836-1849, II, 24. Records of the Presbytery of Salem, 1824-1840, (New School), I, 236. Galbraith, op. cit., 138. Cincinnati Journal, November 17, 1836. New York Observer, December 10, 1836.

<sup>143</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Richland, 1833-1841, II, 114. Pittsburgh Christian Herald, April 27, 1837.

<sup>144</sup>Charleston Observer, August 13, 1836.

Presbyterian, concerning the doctrinal controversy. The chief abettors of abolitionism "make common cause in almost all the great questions of doctrine, order, and organization which now disturb ... our church," he said. Assurances were given to the South, and he appealed to the North to exclude the question of slavery from the Assembly.<sup>145</sup> In May followed the publication of a letter from Samuel Miller to John McElhenny of the Presbytery of Lexington, Virginia. Miller expressed belief that "a large majority" of the Church would "frown on the conduct" of the abolitionists, and "refuse to take another step in concurrence with a course so demented and destructive."<sup>146</sup> The editor of the New York Evangelist was later to observe that "all the delegates from those presbyteries which used to go heart and hand with the New School, such as Charleston, Hanover, etc., are now all united under the other banner. The elaborate defence of slavery by the Princeton gentlemen has therefore not been lost."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>Presbyterian, April 8, 1837.

<sup>146</sup>Charleston Observer, May 6, 1837.

<sup>147</sup>New York Evangelist, May 27, 1837.

May 13, 1837, on the second day of the Old School Convention, the question of human bondage was openly discussed. Robert J. Breckinridge considered it unfortunate that the southern delegates had come to the Convention in this crisis and asked for a change of principle as the price of their aid. He was "against introducing the subject in the Convention or Assembly." He would lay no new burden on them but they should not ask to unsay what their fathers had said. He stood on the action of the Assembly of 1816 as many felt that of 1818 went too far.<sup>148</sup> "Leave the question untouched," summed up the position of Thomas Smyth of the Presbytery of Charleston Union. Let the subject "rest untouched," echoed William Plumer of the Presbytery of East Hanover. He gave seventeen reasons why the Assembly should consider the Southern institution beyond its jurisdiction. If the Assembly declared slavery a sin the South would withdraw. George Baxter of the Presbytery of West Hanover, Virginia, concurred with Plumer.<sup>149</sup> Baxter

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<sup>148</sup> New York Observer, May 20, 1837; Cincinnati Journal, June 11, 1837.

<sup>149</sup> Presbyterian, May 20, 1837; New York Observer, May 20, 1837; Charleston Observer, June 3, 1837; Southern Christian Herald, June 9, 1837.



later told students at Union Theological Seminary, in Richmond, that he went to the convention so that he might feel the pulse of the northern abolitionists of the orthodox party,<sup>150</sup> and concluded that by getting rid of the New School party, they would also get clear of abolitionism.<sup>151</sup> Like Plumer, who had recently been accused by the abolitionists of trying to apprehend his run-away slave, Baxter had made the switch from the New to Old School after the rise of abolitionism. The Southern delegates had been among the most active in the convention, and it was voiced publicly later by members of the convention that the "Philadelphia Junto ... had sold their influence to Plumer and other members of the South."<sup>152</sup> On May 13, Breckinridge wrote his wife: "The Southern members want us to say things in favor of Slavery which are both false and impossible, and seem resolved to press it."<sup>153</sup> The same day, however, a committee had been selected to draw up resolutions for consideration

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<sup>150</sup>Crocker, op. cit., 57.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 70; Charleston Observer, August 26, 1837.

<sup>152</sup>Papers of the Breckinridge Family, 1752-1904, XC, (Library of Congress), Henry Spies to Robert J. Breckinridge, January 27, 1941: hereafter cited as the Breckinridge Papers. See Beecher, Autobiography, II, 428.

<sup>153</sup>Breckinridge Papers, LXXIV. Robert J. Breckinridge to Sophy Breckinridge, May 13, 1837.

of the convention. W.H. Foote of Virginia, one of the committee members, reveals that Miller, though not a committee member, aided in consultation and his recommendations and revisions of the list of errors were accepted.<sup>154</sup> Before adjourning, the Convention adopted a resolution that "slavery shall not be agitated or discussed in the ... ensuing General Assembly."<sup>155</sup>

In the Assembly of 1837, the house accepted the recommendation of the Committee on Bills and Overtures to lay the subject of human bondage on the table.<sup>156</sup> The editor of the New York Evangelist pointed out that the committee was composed of members who were residents or natives of slave states.<sup>157</sup> The question was brought before the house on two other occasions. Plumer made a speech in which he attacked the spirit of fanaticism. It must be met or "it will ruin our nation," he said.<sup>158</sup> Plumer's speech was characterized as "designed to excite the South to vote as one man against those synods [exscinded synods], because

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<sup>154</sup>Foote, op. cit., 513.

<sup>155</sup>Birney, American Churches, 33.

<sup>156</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1837, 478-79.

<sup>157</sup>New York Evangelist, May 27, 1837.

<sup>158</sup>Philadelphia Observer, July 20, 1837.

they had dared to oppose southern slavery."<sup>159</sup> Elijah Lovejoy claimed "the leading men on both sides" were laboring "to conciliate the South" and make "concessions on the subject of slavery."<sup>160</sup> Concerning that institution, the Illinois Observer concluded that "some of our leading brethren at the East have been disposed to temporize and resort to expedients of human wisdom."<sup>161</sup> The attempt of Nathan S. Beman of the Presbytery of Troy, New York, to get the petitions on slavery read on the floor was quickly suppressed.<sup>162</sup> The Assembly then issued a "Circular Letter" which pointed to fanaticism and radicalism as "the most formidable evils of the crisis."<sup>163</sup> When the excised synods and other New School judicatories held the Auburn Convention later that year, they agreed that there had been an "epidemic of radicalism" that had swept the whole country.

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<sup>159</sup>Cincinnati Journal, June 15, 1837.

<sup>160</sup>Alton Observer cited by Emancipator, August 24, 1837; Philadelphia Observer, July 20, 1837.

<sup>161</sup>Philadelphia Observer, July 20, 1837; Southern Christian Herald, July 28, 1837.

<sup>162</sup>Charleston Observer, August 26, 1837.

<sup>163</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1837, 502-508.

But it had been "prayerfully resisted" in the excised synods and "had passed away."<sup>164</sup>

Although slavery was not mentioned in the excising acts, opinions were soon current that it was at the heart of the causes. The New England Spectator bluntly concluded, "Slavery has done it all."<sup>165</sup> "The peculiar traits of fanaticism, and abolitionism .... have been wedded together and together have marched," said the Charleston Observer.<sup>166</sup> "The principles of fanaticism and radicalism" were "openly avowed and defended by the advocates of the New Divinity," claimed the Southern Christian Herald.<sup>167</sup> But it refused to claim the Southern institution as a cause of division.<sup>168</sup> The Cincinnati Journal flatly informed its readers: "the question is not between new and old school -- it is not in relation to doctrinal errors; but it is slavery and anti-slavery. It is not the standards

<sup>164</sup> New York Observer, October 5, 1837.

<sup>165</sup> Charleston Observer, July 8, 1837; Philadelphia Observer, July 13, 1837.

<sup>166</sup> Charleston Observer, August 26, 1837.

<sup>167</sup> Emancipator, August 17, 1837.

<sup>168</sup> Southern Christian Herald, July 14, 1837. The Southern Religious Telegraph denied that the New School was controlled by Anti-slavery forces, July 28, November 10, 1837.



that are to be preserved but the system of slavery."<sup>169</sup> A correspondent informed the Journal that it was "well understood that a compromise had been effected."<sup>170</sup> The Charleston Observer said four-fifths of the South had gone with the orthodoxy.<sup>171</sup> "The Southern vote hitherto unpledged on either side gave the decisive majority in the Assembly," said William Foote.<sup>172</sup> "Seeing the zeal ... to guard the institution of slavery ... looking to the resolutions passed in the presbyteries, the tone of their journals ... we think we cannot misjudge as to the moving cause which has brought up the south almost as one man," concluded the Alton Observer.<sup>173</sup> The New York Observer acquitted the South of "log-rolling," but said, "though there may have been no bargain made, yet consideration growing out of slavery did influence the votes of some members of the Assembly."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>169</sup>Cincinnati Journal, June 15, 1837.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., June 22, 1837.

<sup>171</sup>Cited by Cincinnati Journal, July 6, 1837.

<sup>172</sup>Foote, op. cit., 511.

<sup>173</sup>Alton Observer, July 20, 1837.

<sup>174</sup>New York Observer, July 15, 1837. The abolitionist press were divided: The Friend of Man did not consider slavery a factor, November 8, 1837; while the Philanthropist did, April 17, 1838.

The Biblical Repertory denied that slavery was a factor in the division,<sup>175</sup> but a correspondent to the Philadelphia Observer claimed he had information from a Southern clergyman that Princeton had agreed to "stay the progress of the northern hordes" in return for Southern support.<sup>176</sup> The Repertory had continued to point out that slaveholders were admitted to the apostolic church,<sup>177</sup> and the Charleston Observer advised the South that the Repertory was "the uncompromising opponent of abolition."<sup>178</sup>

After the division had been accomplished many informed individuals considered human bondage to have been a factor. Gardiner Spring of the Presbytery of New York said it was necessary "to rend the church to avoid being engulfed in the sentiments, feelings, and schemes of the abolitionists."<sup>179</sup> Jonathan Blanchard, a Presbyterian

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<sup>175</sup> Biblical Repertory, IX, No. 3 (July, 1837), 479-80.

<sup>176</sup> Philadelphia Observer, July 13, 1837.

<sup>177</sup> Biblical Repertory, X, No. 4 (October, 1838), 604.

<sup>178</sup> Charleston Observer, February 17, 1837. In 1839, the Charleston Christian Sentinel felt the South owed a debt of gratitude to the Repertory for this position. See: Emancipator, April 4, 1839.

<sup>179</sup> Emancipator, January 10, 1839; Cincinnati Journal, January 3, 1839.

anti-slavery agent, said in London in 1843 that it was "generally admitted that the Presbyterian Church ... was split" by a difference of opinion on the Southern institution.<sup>180</sup> F. W. Graves of the Presbytery of Alton wrote that, "The four synods have been cut off because they tolerate and fellowship the great majority of those members who dare to assert that 'slavery is a sin.'" <sup>181</sup> Lyman Beecher tersely concluded, "'twas slavery that did it,"<sup>182</sup> and Samuel Cox of the Presbytery of Brooklyn agreed that it "made the schism."<sup>183</sup> Robert J. Breckinridge claimed the question of human bondage was of little or no importance in the division,<sup>184</sup> but Benjamin Gildersleeve, editor of the Charleston Observer, revealed that "this same Robert J. Breckinridge ... made repeated addresses in Philadelphia ... during the sessions of the Assembly showing

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<sup>180</sup> Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Conference, British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, June 13 to June 20, 1843 (London: John Snow, 1843), 94-95.

<sup>181</sup> F. W. Graves to Elijah Lovejoy, July 19, 1837, in the Alton Observer, August 10, 1837.

<sup>182</sup> Beecher, Autobiography, II, 429.

<sup>183</sup> Letter to Pittsburgh Presbyterian Advocate, December 18, 1850.

<sup>184</sup> Southern Christian Herald, September 7, 1838.

that the North was in much greater danger than the South from the spirit of abolitionism."<sup>185</sup>

After the Assembly of 1837, the question of human bondage came up in the Synods of North Carolina and Virginia. While North Carolina denied that abolitionism was a factor in the division,<sup>186</sup> Virginia took no official action on slavery, but a correspondent to the Southern Religious Telegraph maintained that the latter's approval of the excising acts was motivated by considerations concerning the institution. "Remove from these excised synods all suspicion of abolitionism ... and not one member would have thought it important enough to drag from its obscurity the Act of Union of 1801," declared the writer.<sup>187</sup> The Synod of South Carolina and Georgia declared the action of 1818 void.<sup>188</sup> The Presbyteries of Charleston Union and Hopewell took similar action in April, 1838,<sup>189</sup> and the Presbytery of Flint River, Georgia, instructed her

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<sup>185</sup>Charleston Observer, June 30, 1838.

<sup>186</sup>Elwyn A. Smith, loc. cit., 45.

<sup>187</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, January 5, 1838.

<sup>188</sup>Charleston Observer, November 25, 1837.

<sup>189</sup>Charleston Observer, April 14, April 21, 1838.



commissioners to the next Assembly not to introduce "the subject of abolitionism," but if it came up to insist that it involved only civil matters.<sup>190</sup> In the East the Presbytery of Carlisle, which had instructed its commissioners to the Assembly of 1837 "to oppose in every proper way the agitating principles and practices of the immediate abolitionists,"<sup>191</sup> now adopted resolutions condemning these reformers.<sup>192</sup> In western Pennsylvania, Jonathan Blanchard accused the Synod of Pittsburgh of putting a gag on anti-slavery announcements.<sup>193</sup> But in the Middle West, the Synods of Illinois and Cincinnati took a stronger stand. Illinois considered that holding men as property was an offense requiring discipline, and Cincinnati petitioned the Assembly to require the judicatories to act on the same matter.<sup>194</sup> The New York Evangelist continued

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<sup>190</sup>Philanthropist, May 15, 1838.

<sup>191</sup>George Norcross (ed.), The Centennial Memorial of the Presbytery of Carlisle (2 vols.; Harrisburg: Meyers Printing and Publishing House, 1889), 134.

<sup>192</sup>Emancipator, September 14, 1837.

<sup>193</sup>Philanthropist, August 28, 1838.

<sup>194</sup>Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855 (New School), I, 120. Cincinnati Journal, November 9, 1837.

its attack on slavery: "It is the object of the Christian minister to proclaim the nature, justice, and purity of the divine law -- can he do it without inculcating anti-slavery principles?"<sup>195</sup> The Cleveland Observer echoed this sentiment by announcing, "slavery is a sin and ... the pulpit is the proper place to say so."<sup>196</sup>

Before the Assembly of 1838, an orthodox convention met in Philadelphia for consultation. Measures were adopted to prevent the agitation of the problem of human bondage in the Assembly. It was agreed to dispose of without debate, any measure that came before the house.<sup>197</sup> When the Assembly of 1838 met, this agreement was effectively carried out.<sup>198</sup> After the Assembly refused to seat the members of the excised synods, a New School General Assembly was organized which also effectively prevented the slavery question from coming to the floor.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup>Cited by the Cleveland Observer, February 22, 1838.

<sup>196</sup>Cleveland Observer, April 12, 1838.

<sup>197</sup>New York Observer, May 26, 1838.

<sup>198</sup>New York Observer, June 2, 1838; Cincinnati Journal, June 21, 1838.

<sup>199</sup>Assembly Minutes, New School, 1838, 656.

North of the Ohio River there was a belt of strong anti-slavery supporters who had migrated from the South during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, in a large part because of opposition to slavery.<sup>200</sup>

Their anti-slavery interest pre-dated the rise of the Garrisonian movement in New York and New England.<sup>201</sup>

In contrast to Garrisonianism the anti-slavery movement in these quarters was pervaded with a strong religious inclination. In contrast to the orthodox Presbyterians in other areas of the North, the conservatives in this region were often stronger on the slavery question than

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<sup>200</sup>Manuscript History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Indiana (2 vols.; in Indiana State Historical Library), II, 95. Manuscript: Peter Van Arsdale, A History Written by Himself (in Indiana State Historical Library), 16. Alice D. Adams, The Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America, 1808-1831 (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1908), 58-61. David C. Schilling, "Relations of Southern Ohio to the South During the Decade Preceding the Civil War" Ohio Historical and Philosophical Society Quarterly, VIII, 1913, No. 1, 114. Robert E. Chaddock, "Ohio Before 1850: A Study of the Early Influence of Pennsylvania and the Southern Population in Ohio" Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), XXXI, No. 2, 33. John D. Barnhart, "The Southern Influence in the Formation of Indiana" Indiana Magazine of History, XXXIII, September 1937, 276.

<sup>201</sup>Letter from Samuel Steele in Cincinnati Journal, cited by Southern Religious Telegraph, August 24, 1837. Alfred A. Thomas, Correspondence of Thomas E. Thomas (Oxford, Ohio: A.A. Thomas, 1909), 24. Edward B. Welsh, "Chillicothe: A Distinguished Rural Presbytery" Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXIII, No. 3, September, 1945, 137-142. Adams, op. cit., 58-61.

their opponents. Two factors had pushed the New School group around Cincinnati into a more compromising position on slavery. They dominated Lane Seminary and the restrictions on the anti-slavery activities of the students there reflected upon them. The New School Cincinnati Journal tended to support the action of the Seminary. The Old School abolitionists became backers of the students and mustered strength in the Synod of Cincinnati to condemn the position of the Journal.<sup>202</sup> Because of the suppression of the Lane debates, the abolitionists rallied to the prosecution of Beecher for doctrinal heresy.<sup>203</sup> When the Presbytery of Cincinnati permitted a slaveholder, Joseph Harrison, to minister to one of its churches, it was the conservatives that carried it to the Synod and prosecuted the charge by which he was removed.<sup>204</sup> But the action of

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<sup>202</sup>Records of the Synod of Cincinnati, 1829-1834 (October 22, 1834), 166-167. See Cincinnati Journal, May 8, 1835, for the Journal's attitude toward the Presbytery of Chillicothe on slavery.

<sup>203</sup>Beecher, Autobiography, 407.

<sup>204</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, New School, 1835-1843, I, 12-13, 187-88. Joseph Harrison to Joshua L. Wilson, November 4, 1835, "Protest of Joshua L. Wilson to the General Assembly, October 29, 1835" Joshua L. Wilson Papers, VI, Cincinnati Journal, December 17, 1835; March 10, 1836; November 17, 1836; June 21, 1838. Philadelphian, January 14, 1836. Southern Religious Telegraph, January 8, 1836; September 28, 1838. New York Observer, June 2, 1838. Philadelphia Observer, July 27, 1837.



the South in throwing its weight with orthodoxy put the Old School abolitionists in this region on the defensive.

Following the General Assembly of 1838, a convention of New School men was held in Cincinnati. Representatives came from most of Ohio and Indiana, with a few from western New York and elsewhere. The convention reaffirmed the action of 1818. Concerning the division, the convention stated "there is reason to believe that the influence of slavery was in a high degree efficacious in leading to the revolutionary proceedings of the Assembly of 1837."<sup>205</sup> After the division of the Synod of Cincinnati in 1838, the part going with the "Constitutional" Assembly adopted measures against slavery,<sup>206</sup> but the conservative counterpart passed even stronger resolutions. The orthodox Synod reaffirmed the Acts of 1818, and asked the next General Assembly "to institute an inquiry in all our presbyteries, in order to ascertain whether this duty has been neglected,

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<sup>205</sup>Cincinnati Journal, July 26, 1838. This same resolution was adopted by the New School Synod of Indiana when it met in the autumn of 1838. See: A History of the Presbyterian Church in the State of Indiana (Manuscript: Indiana State Library); Records of the Synod of Indiana, New School, 1826-1845, I, 257-58. In asking the Assembly of 1839 for action on slavery, the Presbytery of Ripley said: "Slavery has been the means by which the Presbyterian Church has been rent asunder." Philanthropist, July 30, 1839.

<sup>206</sup>Cincinnati Journal, October 25, November 8, 1838; New York Evangelist, November 17, 1838; Philanthropist, October 30, 1838.

and if so, to take such order on the subject as will tend to hasten the emancipation of the oppressed."<sup>207</sup> But many Old School men were unwilling to split their local bodies. In the autumn of 1838, before the Synod met, they organized themselves into a convention under the leadership of Robert Bishop of the Presbytery of Oxford. Bishop addressed the convention with a plea for unity and asked that the local bodies be permitted to belong to either Assembly.<sup>208</sup> In December, they met again in more permanent form and resolved that slavery was "a heinous sin" for which discipline could not be omitted without neglect of duty.<sup>209</sup> This "independent" movement lasted until 1840.<sup>210</sup>

In the West, doctrine was not as important as the question of human bondage.<sup>211</sup> A question more urgent than

<sup>207</sup>Cincinnati Journal, October 25, 1838; Presbyterian, November 10, 1838; New York Evangelist, November 10, 1838; Philanthropist, October 30, 1838.

<sup>208</sup>Cincinnati Journal, September 20, 1838.

<sup>209</sup>Philanthropist, January 15, 1839.

<sup>210</sup>James H. Rodabaugh, The History of Miami University from Its Origin to 1885 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Ohio State University, 1937), 132-35.

<sup>211</sup>See letter from John Rankin to the Presbytery of Chillicothe, Cincinnati Journal, July 5, 1838.

doctrine was: "What is the attitude of the Synod toward slavery?" This was posed as the first question when the Synod of Cincinnati convened in 1838.<sup>212</sup> James H. Dickey, an advocate of "old fashioned Presbyterianism," on leave from the Presbytery of Chillicothe as an anti-slavery agent, was unable to decide which way to go. "I hate New Schoolism -- and I hate slavery," he wrote, and "the Old School Assembly are I suppose the most thoroughly imbued with pro-slavery views."<sup>213</sup> He finally went with the conservatives. John Rankin, who like Dickey, saw the schools as not separating exclusively along doctrinal lines, chose the New School as sounder on anti-slavery sentiment.<sup>214</sup> Although he had opposed division like others in the area, his choice was probably influenced by a clash of personality and feelings, long agitated between himself and some of the leading orthodox men in the

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<sup>212</sup>History of the Synod of Cincinnati, New School (Manuscript: Synod Depository, Wooster College, Ohio), no page, no date.

<sup>213</sup>John D. Shane Collection (Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia), James H. Dickey to William Dickey, August 15, 1838.

<sup>214</sup>Letter in the Cincinnati Journal, July 5, 1838.

Presbytery of Chillicothe.<sup>215</sup> The Presbytery of Ripley was set off from Chillicothe as an attempt to stave off a division of that judicatory.

In his speech before the students of Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia, Baxter had claimed that in the Convention and Assembly of 1837, the Old School had had only two abolitionists. They were from the Presbytery of Chillicothe and "professed to be very moderate," according to Baxter. Baxter also claimed that not a voice was raised from among the conservatives, in defense of the anti-slavery resolutions that Beman brought before the Assembly.<sup>216</sup> The two delegates from Chillicothe were Samuel Steele and William Keys. Steele wrote the Philanthropist that slavery had nothing to do with the division.<sup>217</sup> When a correspondent wrote a public letter to Steele detailing Baxter's statements concerning the Presbytery of Chillicothe, Steele replied: Baxter's "facts are mere fictions." He denied that any member of the

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<sup>215</sup>The Life of Rev. John Rankin Written by Himself in His Eightieth Year (Manuscript: Ohio State Historical Society), 39. Joshua L. Wilson Papers, VII, Joshua Wilson to Samuel Wilson, October 31, 1837.

<sup>216</sup>Charleston Observer, August 26, 1837.

<sup>217</sup>Cincinnati Journal, July 27, 1837.



Presbytery was in the convention or that he or elder Keys had "exchanged a syllable with Baxter on the subject" of human bondage. They had returned home, because of illness in Steele's family, before the subject of slavery came to the floor.<sup>218</sup> James Blythe of the Presbytery of Madison also refuted Baxter's claim that the New School was anti-slavery and that the conservatives considered slavery a Bible institution. "This last I deem among the heaviest heresies in the Presbyterian Church, if, indeed, there be such a misguided party in her bosom," said Blythe.<sup>219</sup> When Rankin wrote to the members of Chillicothe claiming the Old School was pro-slavery,<sup>220</sup> he was answered by Steele. Steele drew upon the public letter of Samuel Crothers, of the Presbytery, to Horace Nye<sup>221</sup> of Putnam, Ohio, to show that the "Constitutional" Assembly of 1838 had suppressed

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<sup>218</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, August 25, 1837.

<sup>219</sup>Cincinnati Journal, September 7, 1837; Philadelphia Observer, September 21, 1837.

<sup>220</sup>Cincinnati Journal, July 5, 1838.

<sup>221</sup>Philanthropist, July 3, 1838.

an anti-slavery petition which Crothers caused to be laid before that body.<sup>222</sup>

In the South there was an active minority working to attach that section to the New School. They argued that the Constitution had been over-thrown by the conservatives. The best protection for slavery was said to be in the New School where respect for the Constitution would protect the institution.<sup>223</sup> On the other hand, in the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia, there was a strong movement for an independent Southern Assembly. It was led by the majority party of the Presbytery of Charleston Union. They took the stand that if separation were to come at all, it should be a separation from all of the North. They were under the leadership of Thomas Magruder, I.S. Legare, William C. Dana, and Elipha White -- all of New England origin,<sup>224</sup> and some of whom were connected

<sup>222</sup>Cincinnati Journal, July 19 and August 2, 1838.

<sup>223</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, August 4 and August 18, 1837. Remarks on the Act of the General Assembly on 1837 Submitted for the Consideration of the Southern Presbyterians by a Presbyterian of Virginia (Richmond, Virginia: William MacFarland, 1837), 28, 36-37.

<sup>224</sup>Charleston Observer, January 26, 1839; Liberator, July 20, 1838; Emancipator, January 10, 1839. Smyth (Stoney, ed.), op. cit., 175. George Howe, History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina (2 vols.; Columbus, South Carolina: W.J. Duffie, 1883), II, 596, 573, 603.

with the Congregational Church in Charleston before the founding of the Presbytery of Charleston Union in 1822. After the Southern conventions to establish an independent church came to nothing,<sup>225</sup> Charleston Union became independent and remained so until 1852.<sup>226</sup> These groups made much of the anti-slavery sentiments in the Old School Synod of Cincinnati. The Harrison case was cited as evidence of the action the Old School would take on slavery.<sup>227</sup> The position of Blythe and Steele was brought to the attention of the South. Steele's statements were cited to prove that slavery would be called up later after the question of doctrine was out of the way.<sup>228</sup> But

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<sup>225</sup>Philadelphia Observer, November 16, 1837, May 19, 1838; Southern Religious Telegraph, May 31, and August 23, 1838, January 9, 1839; Charleston Observer, January 26, 1839, November 14, 1840; Pittsburgh Presbyterian Advocate, October 11, 1838, November 25, 1840.

<sup>226</sup>Howe, op. cit., 572-73, 603; Smyth (Stoney), op. cit., 175.

<sup>227</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, September 28, 1838.

<sup>228</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, August 25, 1837; Philadelphia Observer, July 6, August 17, and August 25, 1837.

the New School made even more of the position of Robert J. Breckinridge on the slavery question. They brought up his stand in the Convention, his refusal to remain in the meeting of the Synod of Kentucky when a stand was not taken against slavery,<sup>229</sup> and the seizure of an issue of his Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine from the post office in Petersburg, Virginia, on the grounds that it was incendiary.<sup>230</sup> Thomas Smyth answered these charges in a well documented letter. He cited the Epistle Circular of 1837, and the April 1836, article in the Biblical Repertory as evidence that the conservatives were not anti-slavery. He reported that Miller, Alexander, and other Princeton professors had informed him that "nineteen-twentieths of the Old School party were opposed to abolitionism." What little abolitionist sentiment that existed in the orthodoxy was found in the Middle West.<sup>231</sup> The counter attack

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<sup>229</sup>Philadelphia Observer, July 13, 1837.

<sup>230</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, January 19, April 12, 1838; Charleston Observer, June 30, July 7, July 14, 1838. Baltimore Literary and Religious Magazine, IV, No. 2 (February, 1838), 57-63.

<sup>231</sup>Charleston Observer, December 29, 1839.



was so great that Smyth called on Robert Breckinridge to refute the charges and "Allay the excitement" in the South, especially about the Acts of 1818.<sup>232</sup> Breckinridge's answer was made public in the Charleston Observer of January 26, 1839. It threw the burden of abolitionism in the Synod of Cincinnati on the New School, and assured the South that "the Presbyterian Church never did, and never will claim any power to make new laws, rules, or regulations ... to bind the conscience upon any subject whatever." The charges and counter charges of anti-slavery became so great that Benjamin M. Palmer of the Presbytery of Charleston Union accurately observed in a letter to the Southern Religious Telegraph, October 25, 1838, that "the word abolition has been a kind of talisman in the hands now of this party and now of that, to make each its adversary as odious as possible."

At the time the excising acts were passed in 1837, and in 1838, the "Reformed" Assembly also broke off all relations with the American Education Society, the American Home Missionary Society, and the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. These organizations

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<sup>232</sup>Breckinridge Family Papers, LXXIX, Thomas Smyth to Robert J. Breckinridge, December 21, 1838.

were all under the leadership of New School supporters. As the abolitionist influence began to extend over the country during the early 1830's, the South became actively concerned about the effects of this movement on education. This was more of a concern because heated debates were raging at Western Reserve, Andover, Miami, Amherst, Lane, and Centre College.<sup>233</sup> Oneida Institute, Knox, Oberlin, and Illinois Colleges were thoroughly abolitionized.<sup>234</sup>

Influenced by these circumstances, when a second northern man was added to the faculty of two at Columbia Seminary, the editor of the Southern Christian Herald sounded the alarm. "I want to say," he wrote, "fearlessly

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<sup>233</sup>Barnes, op. cit., 70. See James H. Rodabaugh, The History of Miami University From Its Origin to 1885 (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Ohio State University, 1937); Frederick C. Waite, Western Reserve University: The Hudson Era. A History of Western Reserve College and Academy at Hudson, Ohio, from 1826-1882 (Cleveland: Western Reserve University Press, 1943); Robert S. Fletcher, A History of Oberlin College From Its Foundation Through the Civil War (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College, 1943).

<sup>234</sup>See: Hermann R. Muelder, Fighters for Freedom: The History of Anti-Slavery Activities of Men and Women Associated with Knox College (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Charles H. Rammelkamp, Illinois College: A Centennial History, 1829-1929 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1928); Charles H. Rammelkamp, "Illinois College and the Anti-Slavery Movement" Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Journal Co., 1909), 192-203.

and openly that it ought to go down and another be reared upon its ruins" if it should become "perverted from its original design" by introducing, or even countenancing the "innovations ... so prevalent at the north." The South should "not tolerate the introduction of men opposed to the interests of the South, added the editor.<sup>235</sup> The next year, in 1835, a correspondent to the Charleston Observer pointed out that since some Northern Presbyterian ministers had "polluted themselves by taking part in the unhallowed doings of the abolitionists," all northerners "will rest under the same anathema." The South would soon become "forbidden ground" for the Northern Presbyterian clergy. "What is our recourse? It is to take the Columbia Theological Seminary into our heart of hearts," he said, "and calling upon God to bless this 'vine of his own planting.'"<sup>236</sup>

This was exactly what was being done, according to a report in the New York Observer, but it was with the aid of Northern merchants and the conservative clergy of the East that endowments were raised for the Seminary. On October 14, 1835, at a meeting in New York, funds were

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<sup>235</sup>New York Evangelist, November 8, 1834.

<sup>236</sup>Charleston Observer, November 5, 1835.

raised and resolutions were adopted that they opposed all organizations that aimed at operating upon Southern institutions "in ways subversive of its social tranquility." The meeting pledged itself to cooperate with the South but to "abstain from officious intermeddling with the concerns of our Southern bretheren."<sup>237</sup> During its session in 1836, the Synod of South Carolina and Georgia selected a committee to consult with the Synod of Alabama concerning the shortage of clergy in the South. The committee was instructed to work to supply the "demand for a thoroughly educated native ministry ... peculiarly urgent by our peculiar circumstances." They were advised to secure the support of the Synod of Alabama for Columbia Theological Seminary.<sup>238</sup> But before the report could be made the Seminary was forced to deny charges in the Times-Gazette that it was training many students from the north, some of which were abolitionists. There was only one Northern student and no abolitionists, protested the Seminary students.<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, October 30, 1835; Charleston Observer, November 7, 1835.

<sup>238</sup>Charleston Observer, December 17, 1836.

<sup>239</sup>Cited by Southern Christian Herald, February 3, 1837.



William Plumer made use of the background of controversy at Western Reserve College in an attempt to prove that anti-slavery sentiment was rampant in Western Reserve. Before the students of Union Theological Seminary and in an extra edition of the Southern Religious Telegraph, he said: "In the Western Reserve they have a college where the said B[eriah] Green was some time professor, and where Elizur Wright, Esquire, present secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, was professor, and where the late President [C.B.] Storrs was a thorough going abolitionist." The editor of the Philadelphia Observer, August 17, 1837, charged that "for this the Western Reserve Synod must be turned out of the Presbyterian Church, without trial, as a punishment for having 'had a college' where three men became abolitionists, and resigned!" But the slavery controversy at Lane Seminary was far more important in attracting attention to the slavery controversy in the colleges. "The place of the Lane Debate in the history of anti-slavery cannot be minimized," said Charles Cole.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>240</sup>Charles C. Cole, The Social Ideals of the Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 199.

It attracted nationwide attention and focused it on the activities of the thoroughly abolitionist schools, Oberlin and Oneida Institute. Oberlin was well endowed by the abolitionist supporters. But its activities, and the announcement in its "Circular" that principles "widely diffused by the college were "Moral Reform and Anti-slavery," would, according to the Boston Recorder, drive off "those who did not wish to have these principles more widely diffused."<sup>241</sup>

The American Education Society was the organ through which the Presbyterian and Congregational churches worked to contribute financial support to the colleges operated by their respective churches. This was one of the methods used to finance the training of the ministry. The Presbyterian Church also had its own Board of Education which performed a similar service. The American Education Society was under the leadership of New School men, and the colleges under the management of this party were more often affected by abolitionism. At the same time increased

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<sup>241</sup> Boston Recorder, August 5, 1836, September 2, 1836. Some backed down on their pledge because of the Oberlin heresies. In 1838, because of the New York fire of 1836, and the panic of 1837, officials found it necessary to go to England to raise \$30,000 to cancel Oberlin's debts. See Fletcher, op. cit., 61, 268, 491.

confidence in the orthodoxy, no doubt, resulted from the publicity of the suppression of J.W. Nevin's speech scheduled before the American Anti-Slavery Society. Nevin was a professor at Western Theological Seminary.<sup>242</sup>

The competition between the American Education Society and the Presbyterian Board of Education was the result of two factors; the natural rivalry between the leaders of the two groups, and the fear of the spread of "new measures" and "new doctrines." Before the excising acts were passed in May, 1837, in commenting about affairs at Oberlin College the editor of the Presbyterian said: "We are certified that no inconsiderable portion of the money collected from Presbyterian churches by this disguised Society [the American Education Society] is appropriated to the support of students in Oberlin." The Southern Christian Herald added: "This Oberlin is a Theological-Literary Institution in that hot-bed of Taylorism, Finneyism, and abolitionism, the Western Reserve of Ohio. It was formed originally ... for the accomodation of the revolted students who left Lane Seminary."<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>242</sup>Weld-Grimké Letters, 223, Nevin to Theodore Weld, June 2, 1835, I; Liberator, June 20, 1835; New York Evangelist, June 13, 1835.

<sup>243</sup>Southern Christian Herald, March 17, 1837.

But the struggle concerning education went back to earlier days. In 1835, Samuel B. How of New Brunswick, New Jersey, wrote Joshua L. Wilson that, through an agent, he had sent to the Cincinnati region papers "containing my views" of the origin of the evils which now distract the Presbyterian Church and "the suitable remedy." In discussing the difficulty in the East, How said concerning Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania that "There is a strong presumptive, if not direct, evidence, that [George] Duffield and others, had determined to change it into a New School College and were disappointed only by the vigorous resistance of W.W. Farlane and myself. Duffield had visited New England and had corresponded to my certain knowledge with Arthur Tappan."<sup>244</sup> Tappan had given aid to the abolitionists in both Lane and Oberlin.<sup>245</sup>

But Old School colleges also contained abolitionism. Besides difficulties at Centre College and Miami

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<sup>244</sup>Joshua L. Wilson Papers, VI, Samuel B. How to Joshua L. Wilson, May 7, August 5, 1835.

<sup>245</sup>Fletcher, op. cit., 238.



University, there was an Anti-Slavery Society among the students of Hanover College. In 1836 this society published a "Preamble and Constitution of the Anti-Slavery Society of Hanover College and Indiana Theological Seminary."<sup>246</sup>

At the semi-annual meeting of the Board of Trustees on March 19, 1836, the Board announced: "No such society is authorized ... nor will be encouraged by those who are entrusted with the management of the institution. At least nine-tenths of the students ... entirely disapprove and condemn ... the said society," insisted the report of the trustees. But the trustees felt the most effective way to deal with the society was "to leave it to the influence of the voluntary disapprobation of an enlightened public and of the officers and students."<sup>247</sup> But the evangelical faction of the South made full use of this situation. At a meeting of one of the presbyteries in Virginia, in 1836, it was publicly stated that the President of Hanover College, John Matthews, and the Professor of Theology, were abolitionists.<sup>248</sup> A correspondent to the Southern Religious

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<sup>246</sup> Cincinnati Journal, April 7, 1836.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.; Southern Religious Telegraph, April 22, 1836.

<sup>248</sup> Southern Religious Telegraph, April 29, 1836.

Telegraph denied this. He claimed to have received a communication from the Hanover College Anti-Slavery Society which revealed that the constitution of the Society had been "prepared and partly printed" without the knowledge of the College and trustees. Only nine students were members of the society.<sup>249</sup> In January, 1837, a few months before the excising acts, it was announced that John Witherspoon had been offered the presidency of the college. No better choice could have been made to quiet the anxiety about the charge of abolitionism in the orthodox colleges. The Southern Christian Herald approvingly announced that Witherspoon had boldly resisted "new measures and new divinity." "He ... will ... be instrumental in retaining the patronage" of the college, concluded the Herald.<sup>250</sup> He did not accept the offer, but the decision did not come until after the meeting of the Assembly of 1837.

In September, 1837, the New York Observer published a letter from Charles E. West, formerly a professor at

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<sup>249</sup>Ibid.

<sup>250</sup>Southern Religious Herald, January 27, 1837.

the Oneida Institute which was under the presidency of Boriah Green. The New York Observer characterized the school as "the focus of religious fanaticism and radicalism." Before West "resigned in disgust," he had witnessed the President absorbing "no small share" of his time "in giving lectures on abolition." The impression Green "endeavours to make ... is that ... abolition must be the absorbing topic," concluded the writer.<sup>251</sup> Commenting on this, the Presbyterian added: "Until Presbyterians are prepared to have the church flooded by such radicalism as is nurtured in Oneida, they must persist in sustaining the Assembly in its work of reform."<sup>252</sup>

When the Synod of Virginia approved the action of the Assembly of 1837, it was reported that "a strong influence was put forth by persons in the employ of the Assembly's Board of Education to secure the result that has been obtained. The agent of that Board for Virginia and North Carolina, Mr. [James] Wood, was sent to the North in August last, to attend the Convention at Auburn, and gather up the gossip and slang ... His letters were sent far and wide through the field of his labours, and his

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<sup>251</sup>New York Observer, September 30, 1837.

<sup>252</sup>Presbyterian, October 21, 1837.

personal influence and his official standing were employed to secure [for] his statements both currency and credit." The statements of Francis M'Farland, Secretary of the Board of Education, at the Synod meeting "had great influence, and many ... voted to sustain the Assembly's doings" because of him. The Synod had voted to sustain the acts in "the belief" that they would "rid themselves of the anti-slavery influence of the North."<sup>253</sup>

In the spring of 1839 a correspondent to the Charleston Observer, in reporting the action of the Presbytery of Hopewell, said that the Presbytery "with their Old School brethren in other parts of the church" would use all proper means to prevent the funds bequeathed to the church by pious and orthodox Presbyterians ... for educating the Ministry ... from being used by the New School to promote Taylorism and abolition."<sup>254</sup> During the same year a heated debate over slavery took place at the meeting of the Presbyterian Board of Education. Representatives from the West were strong on the sinfulness of slavery, and Alvan Stewart of the Presbytery of Oneida

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<sup>253</sup>Philadelphia Observer, November 23, 1837, James Wood was a member of the Presbytery of Fayetteville, and Francis M'Farland was a member of the Presbytery of Lexington, Virginia.

<sup>254</sup>Charleston Observer, April 20, 1839.



told the Board that the excscinded synods had been expelled "solely on account of slavery."<sup>255</sup> Stewart, one of the leading abolitionists, had been responsible for the organization of the first anti-slavery society in New York.

There is no evidence that would indicate that the American Education Society was actively promoting abolitionism. There is no mention of the subject in the Annual Reports of the Directors of the American Education Society.<sup>256</sup> The American Quarterly Register, organ of the Society, contained only one article on slavery during the period from 1835 to 1843. In November, 1836, it carried an article entitled "Russian Slavery." The article concluded by saying, "What we can complain of is that an irresponsible power should be lodged in the hands of so many over the great body of the subjects."<sup>257</sup> This was a concise summary of the position taken by the anti-slavery section of the Presbyterian Church against American slavery. But on the other hand, the Society had worked to check the

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<sup>255</sup>Charleston Observer, June 1, 1839.

<sup>256</sup>Annual Reports of the Directors of the American Education Society (Boston: Perkins and Marvin Publishers), 16th, 1832, to the 21st, 1837.

<sup>257</sup>"Russian Slavery," American Quarterly Register, IX, No 2 (November, 1836), 148.

growth of abolitionism in the colleges. At the time of the Lane debates the Society was holding its annual meeting in New York. A conference "unanimously agreed that the time imperiously demanded that all anti-slavery agitation should be suppressed." They sent copies of their resolution to every member college in the country.<sup>258</sup>

The American Home Missionary Society was the agency through which the Presbyterian and the Congregational Churches supported ministers in destitute areas. In discussing the division years later, James Johnston, the Home Missionary agent for Indiana, said after pointing to doctrine and mode of conducting missions as causes of division: "But the division ... would not have been effected by both these causes united had it not been for the fatal efficacy of another cause still ... Some who acted the most conspicuous part, and exerted the greatest influence in regard to the whole matter were distinguished for their hostility to anti-slavery sentiments. To this is to be attributed, in a great measure, their opposition to ... New England minister, and ... the American Home Missionary Society, as the organ for introducing such ministers into

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<sup>258</sup>Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 70. Friend of Man, September 15, 1836.

the Presbyterian Church."<sup>259</sup> But Johnston's communications and reports to the New York office of the American Home Missionary Society contain no mention of slavery. That there were abolitionists in connection with the Society, there is no room to doubt. Jonathan Cable of Ohio and Elijah Lovejoy of Missouri belonged to this class of missionaries from New England,<sup>260</sup> and many were found in the ranks of contributors to the AHMS fund. Daniel W. Lathrop, agent for Western Reserve in 1836, believed that the abolitionists contributed to the American Home Missionary Society "probably more than four-fifths of all ... funds on this field."<sup>261</sup> In answer to an inquiry Absalom Peters took the stand that the Society had nothing to do with abolitionism or slavery, and was devoted to sending the gospel to aid feeble congregations without respect to political institutions.<sup>262</sup> In October, 1837,

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<sup>259</sup>James H. Johnston, A Historical Discourse Presenting Facts Respecting the Progress of Presbyterianism in the State, During That Period (Indianapolis: Holloway, Douglas and Co., 1865, 19.

<sup>260</sup>American Home Missionary Papers (Chicago Theological Seminary), Jonathan Cable to Absalom Peters, June 15, 1837. Hereafter: AHMS Correspondence.

<sup>261</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Lathrop to Absalom Peters, February 27, 1836.

<sup>262</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Letter Book K. (1837-1838), 176, Peters to S.W. Magill, date illegible.

Amos Savage of Utica, New York, lamented the silence of the Society on the anti-slavery cause in order "to get Southern contributions .... I am not prepared yet," he said, "to go to the full length of some who refuse to contribute to any of the Societies which receive contributions derived from the sweat and blood of the Slave." But he felt the question should be settled.<sup>263</sup>

During the early 1830's missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions were actively engaged in trying to shape public opinion against slavery in the United States. By 1835, rumors were being circulated sufficiently to cause the Board to become concerned about the influence of anti-slavery sentiment among the missionaries in the Sandwich Islands. After a committee investigation the Board, however, expressed complete confidence in the missionaries, "the unfounded reports occasionally circulated notwithstanding."<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Amos Savage to Peters, October 23, 1837.

<sup>264</sup>Annual Report, 1835, American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, Boston, 23. Hereafter: Annual Report: ABCFM. Charles K. Whipple, Relation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to Slavery (Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1861), 10.



In 1837 the Board received two letters from missionaries in Hawaii asking that slavery be "immediately abolished," and during the same year a similar letter from the Islands informed the Emancipator that the mission where the writer was stationed was "to a man ... in favor of immediate emancipation of the Slave."<sup>265</sup> The missionaries in Hawaii sent out two anti-slavery documents printed on the mission presses, appealing to American Christians to work to overthrow American slavery, and asking the Board to work to abolish slavery. The Society referred the whole problem to a committee which reported that the printing presses were not to be used to print "any Letter, Tract or appeal ... with a view to its Being Sent to Individuals, or Communities in the United States."<sup>266</sup> It is very unlikely that the situation in Hawaii was unknown in the South, since some of the Board members were from the South. There were missionaries in Hawaii who regularly received the Southern Religious Telegraph and communicated with the editor.<sup>267</sup> Early in 1837, James T. Woodbury

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<sup>265</sup>Whipple, op. cit., 6-7.

<sup>266</sup>Annual Report: ABCFM, 1837, 27. Whipple, op. cit., 9.

<sup>267</sup>Southern Religious Telegraph, May 27, 1836.

addressed a letter to David Green, Secretary of the Board, posing questions on the relations of the Board concerning slavery. The Secretary answered that the Board had refused a legacy of slaves; the missionaries among the Southwestern Indians had purchased slaves in order to let them work out their freedom; and the Board had instructed these missionaries to discontinue hiring slave labor. This letter and reply were given wide circulation.<sup>268</sup>

In April, 1837, when a large contribution was pledged annually by a missionary meeting in South Carolina, the Emancipator took up the story and questioned whether the Board could accept "the fruits of deliberate and systematic robbery .... Will God accept robbery for an offering?" questioned the Emancipator.<sup>269</sup> In June, 1837, the editor of the Charleston Observer stated that he did not believe the Missionary Herald, journal of the ABCFM, and the Prudential Committee of the Board favored abolitionism. But the Milledgeville (Georgia) Journal was by "no means solitary

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<sup>268</sup> New York Observer, April 8, 1837; Southern Religious Telegraph, May 5, 1837.

<sup>269</sup> Southern Religious Telegraph, April 21, 1837; Philadelphia Observer, August 17, 1837.

in the feelings" that it did, concluded the editor. The Journal had pointed out that the Missionary Herald carried announcements of the American Anti-Slavery Society under the heading of "benevolent operations." It "merits the execration of the too confiding Southern people," said the Journal.<sup>270</sup>

The action of the New School General Assembly of 1839 would seem to serve as a key for the evaluation of the degree of anti-slavery sentiment in that body. If the anti-slavery forces had been as strong in the expelled synods as some Southern advocates had claimed, it would have been expected that slaveholders would have been expelled forthwith from the New School. Instead, it was not until 1857 that slaveholders left the New School, and then largely of their own choice.

When the New School Assembly opened in 1839, there were memorials on slavery from ten presbyteries. Of the twenty-nine presbyteries that were excinded in 1837, three sent up memorials -- Oneida of the Synod of Utica, Chemung of the Synod of Geneva, and Angelica of the Synod of Genesee. The other seven were largely from the Middle

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<sup>270</sup> Cited by the Charleston Observer, July 29, 1837.

West.<sup>271</sup> During the debate on the slavery question, when it appeared that the conservatives from the East would commit the Assembly to no action, Lucien Farnam of the Presbytery of Peoria, Illinois, informed the Assembly that "the western presbyteries would have no further connexion with the body" if nothing was done on the subject of slavery.<sup>272</sup> The Illinois Observer had taken a stand similar to this in 1837 by saying the West should refuse to connect itself with any new organization that tolerated

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<sup>271</sup>Religious Telegraph and Observer, May 30, 1839. The Presbytery of Erie adopted non-fellowship resolutions that the commissioners were instructed to present to the Assembly. See: Records of the Presbytery of Erie, 1838-1850, I, 46; New York Observer, June 1, 1839. The views of the Presbyteries of Madison, Indiana, and Cincinnati and Oxford, Ohio, and Knox, Illinois were to be presented to the Assembly by the commissioners. See: Records of the Presbytery of Madison, New School, 1838-1857, 23. Records of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, New School, 1835-1843, I, 296. Joshua L. Wilson Papers, VII, Resolutions of the Presbytery of Oxford, 863. Records of the Presbytery of Knox, New School, 1838-1844, 4-7, 13. The commissioner of the Presbytery of Athen, Ohio, said in the Assembly, that his Presbytery's memorial had been lost. See: New York Observer, June 1, 1839. The Presbyteries of Ripley, Ohio; Montrose, Pennsylvania; the Church of Yates, Presbytery of Niagara, and citizens of Philadelphia, presented memorials to the Assembly. See: Assembly Minutes, New School, 1839, pages 10, 11, 14, 15.

<sup>272</sup>New York Observer, June 15, 1839.



slavery.<sup>273</sup> After removing all reference to the Acts of 1818 from the committee report on slavery, the Assembly adopted measures to send the question back to the presbyteries for whatever action they considered "judicious and best adapted to remove the evil."<sup>274</sup>

The vote on this decisive measure was a fair barometer of the extent of anti-slavery sentiment in the part of the church that went with the excinded synods, as well as that in the four synods that were voted out of the Church. Not a single delegate from the Synod of Albany voted against the refusal of the Assembly of 1839 to uphold the Acts of 1818 or to commit itself on slavery. Albany was the only up-state New York synod not voted out of the Assembly of 1837. In the excinded synods a majority also approved the action of 1839 by a close vote. The synods of the Middle West that chose to go with the New School alone voted in a majority against this action, while the Eastern synods of New York, Pennsylvania, and

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<sup>273</sup>Cited by Southern Christian Herald, July 28, 1837.

<sup>274</sup>Religious Telegraph and Observer, May 30, 1839. See Assembly Minutes, 1839, 20, 22.

New Jersey gave a strong majority in support of the Assembly action.<sup>275</sup>

It is clear that the anti-slavery feeling in central and western New York was over-sold in the South, and that it was stronger in the Middle West than was indicated in the expression of the public mind. It is significant that there seemed to be very little support for anti-slavery sentiment in Albany, the only upper New York synod not removed from the church. On the other hand, if slavery had been the chief reason for the excising acts, all indications are that Michigan, which went entirely with the New School, should have been removed instead of Western

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<sup>275</sup> Assembly Minutes, New School, 1839, 20. The votes were divided as follows:

Excised Synods, 27 yeas, 21 noes.

	Yeas	Noes
Utica	8	3
Geneva	9	7
Genesee	3	8
Western Reserve	7	3

Middle West (exclusive of Western Reserve), 12 yeas, 17 noes.

	Yeas	Noes
Indiana	2	2
Illinois	4	4
Ohio	4	4
Michigan	2	7

Eastern Synods, 22 yeas, 3 noes.

	Yeas	Noes
New York	11	0
Pennsylvania	7	1
New Jersey	4	2

Reserve. With the exception of southwestern Ohio, slavery seemed to have been an important factor in determining the choice of "schools" in the Middle West, but probably more important was the natural sympathy of attachments along ethnic lines with the New England inclinations going with the New School, and the Scotch-Irish dominance aligning with the Old School.<sup>276</sup> But in the East, it was doctrine that was the decisive factor that brought the New School men into this connection.

In the heat of the debate on slavery during the Assembly of 1839, Calvin Stowe, of Lane Seminary, introduced a measure to make the synods the final court of appeal. It passed over objections on the floor by Rankin, Alvan Stewart, and George Duffield. They felt this was a way of avoiding a stand on slavery. Stowe denied that it had anything to do with slavery, but added "it is plain," that we "never could harmonize on the old basis." He thought it best to leave the subject of slavery where it was and go into a new arrangement which would relieve all sides from the difficulty.<sup>277</sup> After a study of the literature of the period and the composition of the New School

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<sup>276</sup>Sylvester F. Scovil, "The Presbyterians of Ohio," Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications, III, (1891), 215-216.

<sup>277</sup>New York Observer, June 15, 1839. See Assembly Minutes, 1839, 16, 27.

Assembly of 1839, one must agree with the Philadelphia Observer that the Old School had been successful in effecting the division by "crying out 'Error' in one place, 'Eastern Influence' in another, and 'abolition' in another."<sup>278</sup> Although doctrine was the cause of the division, it is difficult to see how it could have been accomplished without the entering wedge of slavery.

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<sup>278</sup>Philadelphia Observer, July 26, 1838.



## CHAPTER II

### THE CHURCH CRYSTALLIZES ITS POSITION ON SLAVERY

The "Constitutional" Assembly of 1840 refused to reaffirm the action of 1818 as proposed by Henry Shedd, of the Presbytery of Marion, Ohio, but also voted down a proposal that the "Church has no control or power to legislate" concerning servitude.<sup>1</sup> Many judicatories had asked the Assembly to take immediate action to abolish slavery or to reaffirm the measures of 1818. On the other hand, the Presbytery of Harrisburg petitioned the Assembly to draw the boundaries so that each would embrace all free regions or Southern regions in order that ecclesiastical action would rest entirely on those responsible for the institution.<sup>2</sup> After considerable debate the Assembly indefinitely postponed all action. A more serious question before the

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<sup>1</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1840 (New School), 12, 19. The New School Church preferred to call itself the "Constitutional" Assembly and termed the Old School Church the "Reformed" Assembly.

<sup>2</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Trumbull, 1827-1847, I, 363-65. Alton, 1836-1850, 73. Knox, 1838-1844, 25. Marshall, 1838-1845, I, 83. Presbytery of Watertown asked the Assembly to take some action: P.H.Fowler, Historical Sketch of Presbyterianism Within the Bounds of the Synod of Central New York (Utica, New York: Curtiss and Childs, 1877), 155. Presbytery of Harrisburg: Norcross, op. cit., 134. Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1838-1848, I, 25-26.

Assembly resulted from the rules adopted by many presbyteries refusing to admit to their pulpits or communion those justifying or involved in voluntary servitude.<sup>3</sup> The presbyteries had taken this initiative in response to the action of the Assembly in requesting them to take the order best calculated to remove the institution. The Presbytery of Cincinnati had also asked the highest judicatory to take the initiative on this question, and the Presbytery of Ripley had requested that an overture be sent down to the judicatories to change the Constitution so that discipline could be exercised on this question as readily as on other sins. Slavery had been the means by which the Church had been "rent asunder, and for that reason it should not be tolerated."<sup>4</sup> The Synod of Illinois had declared that all who "buy or sell human beings, or claim the right to hold or use them as property" should be "excluded forever" from communion. It recommended to the presbyteries that they adopt similar measures.<sup>5</sup> Near the end of the session the

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<sup>3</sup>Presbytery of Ripley: Philanthropist, July 30, 1839. Records of the Presbytery of Grand River (Ohio), 1836-1849, 104-105. Records of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, 1835-1843, I, 327. Records of the Presbytery of Madison, 1838-1857, 42.

<sup>4</sup>Philanthropist, July 30, 1839.

<sup>5</sup>Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1838-1855, I, 185-188.

Assembly went into a Committee of the Whole, which permitted a secret session. A resolution was adopted requesting these presbyteries "to rescind such resolutions" that excluded "slave-holders from their pulpits and from their communion."<sup>6</sup>

The response from the judicatories was anything but submissive. Many adopted measures refusing the request or asked the Church to rescind its action. Others reaffirmed their former resolutions.<sup>7</sup> The Presbytery of Salem renewed its resolutions and asked the Church to send down an overture which, if adopted, would "forever remove this sin from our body."<sup>8</sup> The Synod of Illinois asked its presbyteries to exclude all of these offenders from the Church when found guilty by "a regular process of church discipline."<sup>9</sup> Other

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<sup>6</sup>New York Observer, June 6, 1840.

<sup>7</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Knox, 1838-1844, 48. Presbytery of Ripley: New York Evangelist, August 22, 1840. Cincinnati Observer, July 30, 1840. Advocate of Freedom, October 29, 1840. Synod of Cincinnati: Ohio Observer, October 22, 1840. Records of the Synod of Michigan, 1835-1851, 217. Records of the Presbytery of Madison, 1838-1857, 127. Presbytery of Erie: Watchman of the Valley, March 4, 1841. Hereafter, Watchman.

<sup>8</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Salem, 1824-1840, I, 316-332.

<sup>9</sup>Signal of Liberty, July 7, 1841.



judicatories came forward with rules of non-fellowship.

In the Presbytery of Ottawa, Illinois, a resolution was introduced recommending that the Synod of Illinois withdraw from the Assembly and the measure was indefinitely postponed.<sup>11</sup> In western New York, the Presbytery of

Genesee solemnly protested against the request to repeal the non-fellowship resolutions.<sup>12</sup> Many judicatories saw the results of emancipation in the West Indies as a full demonstration that preparation was not essential, and that immediate action should be taken. The non-fellowship rules seemed clearly justifiable to them.<sup>13</sup>

The Presbytery of Ripley addressed a letter to all presbyteries. "It must have been obvious to you that slavery has been a prominent means by which the Presbyterian Church has been divided," began the Presbytery, "and you

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<sup>10</sup>Presbytery of Peoria: Signal of Liberty, July 28, 1841; Emancipator, August 5, 1841. Presbytery of Athens: Signal of Liberty, August 11, 1841. Records of the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention of Wisconsin, 1840-1861, I, 75. Hereafter: Records of the Convention of Wisconsin.

<sup>11</sup>Nahum Gould, History of the Ottawa Presbytery (Typescript, Virginia Library, McCormick Theological Seminary, n.d.), 60-61.

<sup>12</sup>New York Observer, March 6, 1841; Liberator, March 19, 1841.

<sup>13</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Salem, 1824-1840, I, 331. Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1826-1845, I, 279. Records of the Presbytery of Marshall, 1838-1845, I, 103.



must see that peace cannot be expected while such an evil is tolerated in our communion .... Are you willing to tolerate slaveholders to preach in your pulpits and commune in your churches?"<sup>14</sup> The Presbytery of Bath, New York, agreed that human bondage had been "a prominent means of dividing the church," and informed Ripley that they would deny fellowship to those involved in such bondage.<sup>15</sup> The Presbyteries of Washtenaw and Springfield, however, refused to deny fellowship.<sup>16</sup> Many presbyteries concurred with the request of Ripley to memorialize the Assembly to send down an overture which, if adopted, would bar voluntary servitude from the Church.<sup>17</sup> The Presbytery of Salem sent

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<sup>14</sup>New York Evangelist, August 22, 1840.

<sup>15</sup>Liberator, March 19, 1841; Signal of Liberty, May 12, 1841. A similar position was taken by others. See: Records of the Presbytery of Erie, 1838-1850, 106. Records of the Presbytery of Alton, 1846-1850, 88-89. Records of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, 1835-1843, I, 360-366. Records of the Presbytery of Madison, 1838-1857, 67. Presbytery of Marion: Watchman, May 19, 1842. The Presbyteries of Salem and St. Joseph postponed action: Records of the Presbytery of Salem, 1824-1840, I, 301; Records of the Presbytery of St. Joseph, 1833-1848, 102. The Presbytery of Portage answered that they would meet the problem when it became a practical situation: Records of the Presbytery of Portage, 1818-1843, III, 250-251.

<sup>16</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Washtenaw, 1837-1848, 96. Records of the Presbytery of Springfield, 1840-1856, III, 14.

<sup>17</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Knox, 1838-1844, 34. Records of the Presbytery of Marshall, 1838-1845, I, 118-121. The Presbytery of Medina: Philanthropist, October 1, 1842.

out its own request asking all presbyteries to answer the following question: "Shall the sin ... be tolerated in the Presbyterian Church?" The answers were to be sent to the Assembly so that united action could be secured on the question of servitude.<sup>18</sup>

In June, 1842, a New School Convention of western Presbyterians was held in Cincinnati at the call of the Presbytery of that city.<sup>19</sup> Strong resolutions were adopted and were approved by all delegates except the two from Kentucky. The holding of men as property was considered "a heinous sin against God .... The experiment in the West Indies" was considered proof that "the only way to elevate the colored race" was to give them freedom.<sup>20</sup> The report adopted was "strong and explicit, presenting a logical series of thorough anti-slavery resolutions," said the Watchman of the Valley.<sup>21</sup> "From all accounts," concluded the Philanthropist, "they were just such as all abolitionists

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<sup>18</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Salem, 1841-1861, II, 11-14.

<sup>19</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Alton, 1836-1850, 106.

<sup>20</sup>Watchman, June 16, and June 23, 1842.

<sup>21</sup>June 16, 1842.

will approve."<sup>22</sup> Letters appeared in the conservative Christian Observer, of Philadelphia, claiming that the measures of the Western presbyteries and convention were threatening the union of the Church. A letter from "an Eastern Man" was addressed to Lyman Beecher concerning "Union of the East and West." It implied that missionary aid for the West from the East was contingent on the willingness of the West to keep quiet on slavery. The writer warned:

The position taken by some of your presbyteries and by the Cincinnati convention on the slavery question is a serious bar to the union of efforts which you invoke for the West. The movement of some of our western brethren to enlist the church in a crusade without and beyond her legitimate province of action ... impairs confidence at the East.

The Watchman of the Valley pointedly answered: "The desired union is utterly unattainable until this fundamental principle of union is settled, and ... the only possible way of settling it is to meet the subject openly, freely and candidly."<sup>23</sup> To the charge that the West was raising "a separating wall" within the church, the Watchman of the Valley agreed and precisely explained that the contest was

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<sup>22</sup>Philanthropist, June 29, 1842.

<sup>23</sup>Cited by the Watchman, November 10, 1842.



"a struggle between the pertinacious slaveholder and the conscientious opposer of his wicked practice."<sup>24</sup>

In 1841 the Presbytery of Cincinnati addressed a "Pastoral Letter" to all churches under its care, calling attention to the evils of bondage.<sup>25</sup> The following year the Synod of Cincinnati asked the General Assembly to bear testimony against the evil.<sup>26</sup> For the fourth consecutive year, in 1842, the Synod of Ohio passed resolutions concerning human bondage. Fellowship was denied to those voluntarily involved in the evil.<sup>27</sup> In up-state New York, however, the Presbytery of Chemung, while deeply deploring the existence of human bondage, resolved that the Assembly should pass resolutions condemning the institution but "clothed in such a spirit as ought not to offend the feelings of those who conceive themselves conscientiously bound

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<sup>24</sup>Watchman, November 24, 1842.

<sup>25</sup>Watchman, May 13, 1841.

<sup>26</sup>Watchman, November 10, 1842. Philanthropist, November 12, 1842.

<sup>27</sup>Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1838-1848, I, 80. Watchman, November 10, 1842. New York Observer, November 26, 1842. For other action against slavery see: Records of the Presbytery of Indianapolis, 1839-1863, I, 23; Records of the Presbytery of Grand River (Ohio), 1836-1849, II, 155; Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, I, 97; Records of the Presbytery of Washtenaw, 1837-1848, I, 202; Presbytery of Des Moines: Watchman, May 26, 1842.



to hold the enslaved, and as not to injure the cause of freedom, nor the interest of religion."<sup>28</sup>

In 1843, as the triennial meeting of the "Constitutional" Church drew near, the Presbyterian press began to consider how the question of human bondage would affect the highest judicatory of the Church. The Watchman of the Valley frankly stated its desire "to enlist the moral force of the whole Church" on the question.<sup>29</sup> The New York Evangelist called on the presbyteries to send to the Assembly "men who will be free to do whatever duty may require to be done" if the problem of slavery comes before the body. The Christian Observer deprecated the introduction of the subject into the highest judicatory, and the New York Evangelist, in reply, felt it shameful for the "Constitutional Presbyterians" to cherish so great a horror of the knife that cut the ligaments of four synods asunder."<sup>30</sup> The Watchman of the Valley concluded, that, "If the friendship and alliance of our Southern brethren is to be purchased by absolute silence on the subject ..., we shall deem the boon too dear to be purchased with such a price."<sup>31</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> New York Observer, March 5, 1842.

<sup>29</sup> Watchman, February 9, 1843.

<sup>30</sup> Cited by: New York Observer, April 1, 1843.

<sup>31</sup> Watchman, May 11, 1843.

New York Evangelist added, "The truth is ... slavery must die .... If there is no hope of this, then we know no special reason for persevering in our connection with the southern churches."<sup>32</sup> The Watchman of the Valley complained that ever since the Western Convention, the Eastern presbyteries had been working to pack the Assembly, and the New York Observer had sounded the alarm that they were "preparing for another division on the subject" and urged all "to the line in the battle."<sup>33</sup> Both the Evangelist and the Watchman asked only that the highest judicatory take the position of the Western Convention.<sup>34</sup>

During the spring meeting of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, a member was unanimously advised that it was "improper" to attach himself to a slaveholding body, and a licentiate, who asked for a letter of dismissal to the Presbytery of North Alabama, was granted a letter but with a recommendation "to put himself under the care of no slaveholding presbytery." Strong resolutions were then addressed to the Assembly to separate itself from those

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<sup>32</sup>Cited by: New York Observer, May 20, 1843.

<sup>33</sup>Watchman, May 4, 1843. New York Observer, June 3, 1843.

<sup>34</sup>Cited by the Watchman, May 4, and May 11, 1843.

upholding bondage. Cincinnati also asked that it be enjoined upon the Southern Church to expel the practice.<sup>35</sup> Other Western judicatories asked the highest court to take decisive action against the Southern institution.<sup>36</sup> Measures were sent to the highest judicatory from sixteen divisions of the Church asking action. The parent body also received a remonstrance from thirty-nine elders of Philadelphia, and one from the Presbytery of Lewes, in Maryland and Delaware, asking that no measures be adopted.<sup>37</sup> In the Assembly the Committee on Bills and Overtures, under the chairmanship of William Wisner, reported resolutions that the institution did not "fall within the constitutional power" of that body.<sup>38</sup> These were set aside in order to consider resolutions by H.H. Kellogg, of Illinois, which reaffirmed the Act of 1818 and urged the presbyteries and sessions to treat servitude as any other

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<sup>35</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, 1835-1843, I, 448-51. Philanthropist, April 26, 1843. In 1844 the Presbytery denied a dismissal to a minister who requested a letter to another slaveholding presbytery: Records of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, 1844-1870, II, 31-33.

<sup>36</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Cleveland, 1830-1849, I, 285; Knox, 1838-1844, 115; Detroit, 1840-1847, II, 104; Galena, 1841-1863, 10-11; Meadville, 1843-1855, 6. Western Citizen, February 23, May 25, 1843. Nahum Gould, op. cit., 95-96.

<sup>37</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1843, 15. See speech of H.H. Kellogg, of Knox, in the Assembly: New York Observer, May 27, 1843.

<sup>38</sup>New York Observer, May 27, 1843.



sin of "great magnitude."<sup>39</sup> The New York Observer claimed that the New York Evangelist and the Watchman of the Valley had been trying to secure "decided Action ... in the true spirit of ultra-abolitionism," and now "a body of men chiefly from western New York, Ohio and Illinois ... were prepared at all hazards to carry their measures through."<sup>40</sup> Duffield denied the charge of the New York Observer that the anti-slavery men had held meetings for consultation at this time.<sup>41</sup> Wisner made a speech taking the position that bondage was not contrary to the Scriptures. "This speech broke the ranks of the abolitionists and prepared the way for their final defeat," said the New York Observer.<sup>42</sup> The Assembly adopted measures that it could take no action on slavery as it was not "for the edification of the church."<sup>43</sup>

The Philanthropist now concluded that the New School, like other national groups, was "pro-slavery and time

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<sup>39</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1843, 15.

<sup>40</sup> New York Observer, June 3, 1843.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., June 10, 1843.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. For the positions of those who influenced the final vote see: Watchman, July 13, 1843; New York Observer, July 1, 10, 1843; Liberator, September 29, 1843; Signal of Liberty, June 19, 1843.

<sup>43</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1843, 19.



serving."<sup>44</sup> A correspondent to the Watchman, writing as "A Western Man," wrote a series of four articles on the question of human bondage in the New School. He concluded that the anti-slavery men of the West had three courses that could be followed in attempting to purify the Church: (1) to stay in the present connection and use love and persuasion, (2) to form a Western Assembly, or (3) to form an anti-slavery Assembly.<sup>45</sup> John Rankin addressed a letter to all "Reformed" and "Constitutional" Presbyterians suggesting they withdraw and form an anti-slavery church. The Presbytery of Ripley had already voted to send no more commissioners to the Assembly if action was not taken in 1843.<sup>46</sup> At the National Anti-Slavery Convention in Buffalo in August, the Presbyterians met to consider what step to take, but after several meetings there was no disposition to forsake the Church.<sup>47</sup>

After the meeting of the higher judicatory in 1843, activity concerning slavery increased in the synods. The

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<sup>44</sup>Philanthropist, June 15, 1843.

<sup>45</sup>Watchman, July 20, August 3, September 14, 1843.

<sup>46</sup>Philanthropist, June 21, 1843. Watchman, August 17, 1843. Liberator, July 7, 1843.

<sup>47</sup>Signal of Liberty, October 2, 1843. Letter from R.B. Bement, Presbyterian clergyman at Battle Creek, Michigan, September 16, 1843.

Synod of Indiana addressed a letter to all synods of their connection in the Southern states. The attempts to suppress discussion of slavery were condemned. The South was advised that "the house of bondage" was not "the school of liberty," and that emancipation was "the best preparation for liberty."<sup>48</sup> The Synod of Ohio sent a pastoral letter to the lower judicatories on the holding of men as chattel and "exceedingly regretted" the lack of "decided testimony in the last Assembly."<sup>49</sup> The Synod of Michigan opposed attempts to gag consideration of the same subject in Congress, and called on this body to enact or reject all petitions on slavery. All "good citizens" were urged to petition Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and the territories.<sup>50</sup> While the Synod of Peoria renewed the non-fellowship rule adopted earlier,<sup>51</sup> the Synod of Illinois left

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<sup>48</sup>Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1826-1845, 310-20.

<sup>49</sup>Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1838-1848, 97-100, 107.

<sup>50</sup>Records of the Synod of Michigan, 1835-1851, II, 36-37. Signal of Liberty, November 13, 1843.

<sup>51</sup>Records of the Synod of Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 7-8.

Christian communion entirely "to the ministers and churches."<sup>52</sup> The action in the presbyteries followed a similar pattern.<sup>53</sup> Most of the western judicatories that had not adopted non-fellowship resolutions took this position during the next few years.<sup>54</sup> But when the Synod of Western Reserve passed these measures in 1845, the Presbytery of Portage considered this action "false and subversive."<sup>55</sup> In June, 1844, a Presbyterian and Congregational Convention, held in Cleveland, passed measures urging the duty of avoiding fellowship with those who supported or were involved in the system. A similar convention was held in Detroit in 1845 and these resolutions were renewed.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855, I, 252-53.

<sup>53</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Logansport, 1839-1844, I, 36-38; Cincinnati, 1844-1870, II, 14-17; St. Joseph, 1833-1848, 193; Alton, 1836-1850, 159-63; Wash-tenaw, 1837-1848, I, 237-38, 252.

<sup>54</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Meadville, 1843-1855, 39-41; Hamilton, 1847-1861, 11-13; Belvidere, 1847-1863, I, 15-16. Presbytery of Peoria: New York Observer, May 30, 1846. Synod of Peoria: Herald of the Prairie, June 6, 1849. Records of the Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, I, 125.

<sup>55</sup>Records of the Synod of Western Reserve, 1825-1845, I, 394. Records of the Presbytery of Portage, 1843-1863, IV, 63-64.

<sup>56</sup>New York Observer, April 20, July 6, 1844, July 5, 1845. Watchman, May 8, July 31, 1845. Western Citizen, August 22, 1844. Signal of Liberty, June 30, 1845. Minutes of the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention, Cleveland, Ohio (Cleveland: T.H. Smead, 1844), 3-6.



Outside of the Middle West the measures of the judicatories took a milder turn. The Synod of Western Pennsylvania condemned the institution of slavery but deprecated "the attempts ... to produce Schism ... on that ground."<sup>57</sup> The Synod of Genesee renewed its measures of 1837, which condemned political preaching on Sunday, and expressed disapproval of "all disorganizing measures ... attempting to promote abolition ... subversive of the peace and harmony of the church."<sup>58</sup> Only the Presbytery of Angelica went as far as withdrawing fellowship from those who "persisted in the practice."<sup>59</sup> In 1845 the Presbytery of Geneva, New York, which had "hitherto remained silent," spoke against human bondage but in stronger terms condemned "agitators."<sup>60</sup>

As the date for the Assembly of 1846 drew near, a group of Indiana Presbyterians met at Logansport. They issued a call for a Presbyterian Anti-Slavery Convention to meet in Philadelphia two days before the convening of the triennial meeting in order "if possible to devise a remedy

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<sup>57</sup>Records of the Synod of Western Pennsylvania, 1843-1870, 9.

<sup>58</sup>The Synod of Geneva took similar action. New York Observer, November 4, 1843.

<sup>59</sup>New York Evangelist, November 16, 1843.

<sup>60</sup>New York Observer, August 31, October 12, November 2, 1844, February 22, 1845. Resolutions on slavery were also passed by the presbyteries of Oswego, Ithica, and Montrose.



for the evil."<sup>61</sup> On February 12, 1846, a letter to the Watchman of the Valley stated that "most strenuous efforts" were being used to prevent a convention or "to keep as many from it as possible." Since every synod "in the western Free States have declared that they will no longer fellowship slaveholders," he added, "to be consistent, then, they can no longer fellowship slaveholders in the Assembly." The Christian Observer objected to the convention, saying, "The strange fire mingled in these efforts awakens deep concern in the minds of many of the most intelligent members of the Church." The editor cited "an esteemed pastor in Pennsylvania" who viewed the convention as a sign of the storm which had been "gathering thicker and blacker for some years."<sup>62</sup> The Detroit Observer considered the gathering "contrary to the genius of the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church," and the New York Observer concluded that "the diversity of sentiment" on bondage rendered "further compromise difficult if not impossible."<sup>63</sup> In the West the Presbytery of Dayton, Ohio, alone expressed disapproval,

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<sup>61</sup>Watchman, November 13, 1845. Anti-Slavery Bugle, February 20, 1846.

<sup>62</sup>Cited by New York Observer, February 7, 1846. See: Watchman, December 18, 1845, February 12, March 5, 1846.

<sup>63</sup>Cited by New York Observer, March 7, February 7, 1846.

and viewed the refusal in the West to hold communion as similar to the Convention of 1837.<sup>64</sup> Critics were answered by the Watchman of the Valley, March 5, 1846, with assurance that the Convention had "no sinister aim." When the Convention met, it agreed that members who persisted in the sin of slaveholding should not "be received or retained within ... fellowship." A provisional committee was appointed to correspond and call meetings to this end.<sup>65</sup>

The Synod of Indiana gradually took the lead against slavery. Feeling that a weakness in the past had been due to a lack of synodical unity, Indiana selected a committee to confer with others in the West in order to propose a single united action to the parent body. In 1845 the committee reported it had joined with others to ask that the highest judicatory send to the presbyteries an overture to make slaveholding a sin forbidden by the eighth commandment.<sup>66</sup> Several presbyteries also concurred in

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<sup>64</sup>Watchman, April 23, 1846.

<sup>65</sup>New York Observer, May 30, 1846.

<sup>66</sup>This would have inserted the word "slaveholding" after the word "man-stealing" in the answer to question 142 of the Larger Catechism. It had been taken out in 1816. Indiana had consulted with representatives of the Synods of Ohio and Cincinnati, and Peoria united without consultation. See Records of the Synods of: Indiana, 1826-1845, I, 334-36, 350-52; Ohio, 1838-1848, I, 119; Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 26-28. Watchman, June 19, October 16, 30, 1845, July 16, 1846; New York Observer, January 4, 1845.

this.<sup>67</sup> The Christian Observer objected to such measures, and emphasized that the standards of the Church did not demand that slavery be condemned. The Watchman of the Valley called "for a decision different from that of the last Assembly."<sup>68</sup> Only four synods, all from the Middle West, and twenty-eight presbyteries petitioned the Assembly on servitude.<sup>69</sup> From the East came the prayers of the Presbytery of Harrisburg beseeching the Assembly to do nothing that would "in the least disturb the peace or endanger the unity" of the Church.<sup>70</sup> The strongest memorials came from the Synod of Peoria, and from the Presbyteries of Cleveland and Grand River.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Presbyteries of Washtenaw, Genesee, Salem and Scioto. See Records of the Presbyteries of: Washtenaw, 1837-1848, I, 272; Alton, 1836-1850, 214. New York Observer, July 16, 1846.

<sup>68</sup> Watchman, May 7, 1846.

<sup>69</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1846, 10. Anti-Slavery Reporter, cited by Watchman, July 16, 1846. Seventeen presbyteries were from the Middle West, eight from central and western New York, and three from western and northwestern Pennsylvania.

<sup>70</sup> Watchman, July 16, 1846.

<sup>71</sup> Records of the Presbyteries of: Cleveland, 1830-1849, 346; Grand River, II, 1836-1849, 249-251; Meadville, 1843-1857, 74-76; Salem, II, 1841-1861, 123; Trumbull, 1827-1847, I, 599-604; St. Joseph, 1833-1848, 193; Galena, 1841-1863, 38; Washtenaw, 1837-1848, I, 272; Indianapolis, 1839-1863, I, 72, 74-80. Records of the Synod of Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 26-28. For the other memorials, see: New York Observer, May 9, 1846; Watchman, April 23, July 16, 1846.



During the debate on servitude the consensus was that they should reaffirm the Act of 1818. It was impossible for the Assembly to decline action and still retain unity after its Old School counterpart adopted new resolutions in 1845. The delegates from the West made it clear that separation would come if action was not forthcoming. Albert Hale, of the Presbytery of Illinois, said if measures were not passed, the churches in the West would be "likely to join a Western Assembly." S. N. Steel, of the Presbytery of La Porte, said: "The West demands action... The importance of the West demands action." J.G. Wilson, of the Presbytery of Logansport, added that the great body of the West was ready to form a new General Synod of Assembly unless the right kind of action were taken. Cyrus L. Watson, of the Presbytery of Cleveland, speaking with the voice of "Young America," said, "The star of empire travelling [sic] westward will soon stand still over the Great Valley, and then we shall give laws to the Atlantic and Pacific slope, and this great country shall be free." Other Westerners spoke in the same vein.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> New York Observer, June 13, 1846.



From the East the attack on abolition competed with the arguments against slavery. C.H. Read, of the Fourth Presbytery of New York, did not know which was more to be feared, "the results growing out of slavery," or the "unholy fire" of abolitionism. H.A. Rowland, of the Presbytery of Montrose, felt the North and South should unite against abolitionism, and J.P. Hovey, of the Presbytery of Ithaca, stated frankly: "I consider abolitionism a heresy." E.F. Hatfield, of the Third Presbytery of New York, informed the Assembly that his presbytery would welcome any Southerner to its pulpits but there were many abolitionists that would not be welcome. "We have no confidence in them," he explained.

From the West, only Duffield spoke against abolitionism.<sup>73</sup> The Third and Fourth Presbyteries of New York were for the mildest possible measures. The delegate from the Presbytery of Rockaway "wanted action that would save the South." James W. Phillips, of Harrisburg, was for "a masterly inactivity." The commissioner of the Presbytery of Pittsburgh wanted an indefinite postponement of the controversy, while the delegate from North River, New York,

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<sup>73</sup> New York Observer, May 30, June 13, 1846; Watchman, June 11, 1846.

read resolutions "deprecating all divisive action."

According to the delegates from the Presbyteries of Hudson and Newark, these bodies would be satisfied if no measures were taken.<sup>74</sup>

When the Committee presented its report, the resolutions followed the position of the conservative East. The highest judicatory had no right "to prescribe any new test by which the churches ... shall be guided in the reception of communicants." The question of slavery was to be sent back to the lower judicatories. W.H. Beecher, from the Presbytery of Maumee, presented a minority report that took the position of the Middle West. It asked the Assembly to send down an overture that would make slaveholding a sin forbidden by the eighth commandment. George Duffield, chairman of the committee, presented a report that took a middle position.<sup>75</sup> After nine days of debate, during which other proposals were rejected, Duffield's modified proposal was accepted by all except those from the South, four conservatives from Pennsylvania, and an abolitionist from the Middle West. The statement reaffirmed all of the Church's resolutions on slavery from 1787 to 1818, and

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<sup>74</sup>New York Observer, May 30, June 13, 1846.

<sup>75</sup>New York Observer, May 30, 1846. The Assembly of 1847 was also asked to send down an overture on the eighth commandment: Assembly Minutes, 1847, 143.

condemned that institution as "intrinsically an unrighteous and oppressive system." The report, however, had declined "to determine the degree of moral turpitude." "Divisive and schismatic measures" were condemned and the "withholding of fellowship" was declined. Since the Assembly had no legislative or judicial authority, the matter was left to the presbyteries.<sup>76</sup>

The Signal of Liberty of June 27, 1846, considered the pronouncement "very ingenious, pleading about equally strong against the 'system' ... (not against slaveholding) ... and against ... abolitionists .... Three sections read one way, and three the other." The New York Observer agreed it might be read "two ways by some." It was called "an explicit testimony against slavery," but "probably a slight modification would have brought general agreement," lamented the Observer.<sup>77</sup> The Watchman of the Valley warned those who joyfully proclaimed "the question settled" that it was "a doomed institution. The anathema of God is upon it ... Every successive General Assembly will press the question further and further to the final issue of a non-slaveholding Church."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1846, 28-31.

<sup>77</sup>New York Observer, June 13, 1836.

<sup>78</sup>Watchman, June 25, 1846.



One of the most divisive questions before the triennial meeting of 1846 was the so-called "Graham Case." William Graham, of the Presbytery of Cincinnati, had denounced abolitionism and defended bondage as a scriptural institution before the Synod of Cincinnati in 1843. He published his statements in pamphlet form in the spring of 1844. A member of Ripley brought a charge against him which was sustained without a dissenting vote in the lower judicatory of Cincinnati. When it was carried to the Synod, he was censured and the Presbytery was instructed to bring him to repentance. When it was reported in October, 1845, that repentance had not been secured from the accused, the Synod suspended him.<sup>79</sup> Graham defended his position in a pamphlet in which he posed as the defender of the position of the General Assembly. His arguments, he said, were aimed at counteracting the influence of the abolitionists.<sup>80</sup>

The Christian Observer, condemned the decision of the Synod,<sup>81</sup> and the New York Observer said, "The ablest and

<sup>79</sup>Watchman, November 7, December 12, 1844; October 30, 1845. William Graham, The Contrast of the Bible and Abolitionism: An Exegetical Argument (Cincinnati: Atlas Office, 1844).

<sup>80</sup>William Graham, The Cause and Manner of the Trial and Suspension of the Rev. William Graham by the New Synod of Cincinnati (privately printed), 3-8.

<sup>81</sup>Cited in the Watchman, January 1, 1846.



best men of the church" would be "liable to the same condemnation" if the Assembly sustained the Synod in its review of the case. In reference to the Philadelphia Convention of 1846 the New York Observer stated, "An ecclesiastical court is about to sit .... A number of judges meet together before the sitting ... and agree upon a decision!"<sup>82</sup> The Princeton Review said of Graham's pamphlet: "His argument is so purely a reiteration of undeniable scripture statements that we hold it to be unanswerable."<sup>83</sup> When the matter came before the Assembly of 1846, the decision of the Synod was called "unconstitutional and irregular and therefore null and void." The Synod was asked to correct its proceedings but twenty-nine members opposed this resolution.<sup>84</sup> When the Synod of Cincinnati met in October, 1846, it refused to reinstate Graham, and asked the Assembly to reconsider the case.<sup>85</sup> In January, 1847, the Presbytery of Hamilton expressed a determination to remain a part of the Synod of Cincinnati only as long as defenders

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<sup>82</sup>New York Observer, February 7, 1846.

<sup>83</sup>Princeton Review, XVI, No. 2 (April, 1844), 310.

<sup>84</sup>The vote against it was divided as follows: seven from Geneva, three from Genesee, one from Meadville, and eighteen from the Middle West. Cincinnati, of course, did not vote on the matter. Assembly Minutes, 1846, 31-33, New York Observer, June 13, 1846.

<sup>85</sup>New York Observer, October 31, November 7, 1846.

of slavery were denied fellowship.<sup>86</sup> Other Western judicatories objected to the decision of the Assembly.<sup>87</sup> Graham presented a memorial on his status to the adjourned Assembly of 1847, but was requested to withdraw it until the next meeting.<sup>88</sup> When Graham left the Synod and took up an Old School pastorate in Pennsylvania, the conflict over this issue died down.<sup>89</sup>

By 1847, nothing short of a completely anti-slavery organization could have stopped the disintegration of the Church in the West. Three decisions in the triennial meeting of 1846 had contributed to this: (1) the measures adopted were not strong enough for many back home, (2) the Graham case offended many bodies that occupied the same position of non-communion as the Synod of Cincinnati, and

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<sup>86</sup> Robert Bishop Papers (Manuscript, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio). Thornton Mills to Bishop, December 1, 1846; C.E. Stowe to Bishop, December 2, 1846. Records of the Presbytery of Hamilton, 1847-1868, 11-13. Watchman, January 14, 1847.

<sup>87</sup> Presbyteries of Ripley and Knox: Watchman, July 9, 16, 1846; and June 3, 1847. Presbytery of Ottawa: Gould, op. cit., 120-121, 133-135; Western Citizen, October 27, 1846; Western Herald, October 21, November 4, 1846; May 5, 1847. Records of the Synod of Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 41-42. Records of the Presbytery of Alton, 1836-1850, 134-35. Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1857, I, 304.

<sup>88</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1847, 142.

<sup>89</sup> Records of the Presbytery of Chillicothe, 1846-1860, IV, 39-40. Galbraith, op. cit., 180-181.

(3) the admission of the Synod of Mississippi had extended the area of slavery in the church.<sup>90</sup> A letter to the Watchman of the Valley on October 14, 1847, frankly posed the question in the minds of many: "What can be done to check and ward off the assaults of the Old School on one side and Congregationalists on the other?" Duffield expressed this fear in his diary. On one side was the "irresponsible spirit of wild lawless democracy ..., the ultra Congregationalists ... and Old School Presbyterianism in another."<sup>91</sup> In June, 1847, a writer from the Presbytery of Knox complained in the Watchman of the Valley that Knox had lost almost half of its members during the past year because of the position of the Church on human bondage. The editor observed that it was "a very easy process for emigrants from New England to transfer their relations from Presbyterian to Congregational Churches."<sup>92</sup> By 1853, the Presbytery had lost one of its most important churches, that of Galesburg, Illinois, because of the connection the Church maintained with the institution of

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<sup>90</sup>Presbytery of Ottawa: Western Citizen, October 27, 1846. Western Herald, October 21, 1846. Records of the Synod of Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 42, November 4, 1846. Presbytery of Ripley: Watchman, July 16, 1846.

<sup>91</sup>George Duffield Diary (Manuscript, Detroit Public Library, Detroit), May 30, 1847, 152.

<sup>92</sup>Watchman, June 3, 1847.



slavery.<sup>93</sup> In November, 1846, the Sixth Presbyterian Church of Cincinnati, which had split off from the First Church because of the question of servitude, became the Vine Street Congregational Church for the same reason. By 1850 the Third Presbyterian Church of Cleveland, a Free Presbyterian body, split off from the Old Stone Church over human bondage and later became the Plymouth Congregational Church. In Chicago, the Third Presbyterian Church, which had been organized as a secession from the First because of slavery, became Congregational in 1850 because of the same problem.<sup>94</sup> In 1851 Charles Hall, Secretary to the A.H.M.S., in answering privately an article in a western Presbyterian paper, denied the statement that "Constitutional" Presbyterianism failed to grow and keep pace with the Old School and Congregationalists in the West because of lack of denominational zeal. The "Reformed" Assembly was so strongly "pro-slavery" that it could "frown down" agitation, and the Congregationalists were anti-slavery in sentiment. "Hence in churches and presbyteries, members and ministers and

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<sup>93</sup>National Era, April 28, 1853.

<sup>94</sup>Charles F. Goss, Cincinnati: The Queen City, 1788-1912 (4 vols., Cincinnati: S.J. Clark, 1912), I, 485. W.R. Coates, A History of Cuyahoga County and the City of Cleveland (4 vols., New York: American Historical Society, 1924), I, 399-400. Records of the Presbytery of Chicago, 1847-1870, 49-50, 67-70, 72-76. Presbytery Reporter, II, No. 1 (May 1, 1851), 44-46.



churches drop off individually or in masses to the one side or the other to get rid of agitation or personal responsibility. I know of many illustrations of this; and more are in the prospect," he said.<sup>95</sup>

In 1847, the Presbytery of Grand River, Ohio, began to suffer severely because of withdrawals. Churches in Austinburg, Painesville, and Thompson requested withdrawal because they opposed human bondage. The Presbytery requested the Assembly of 1847 to take "uncompromising action" on the subject, and when this was not done, the Presbytery was forced to deny a request for withdrawal from the Assembly for the purpose of organizing a body on the principles of "New England Associations." But the worst was yet to come. In 1850, the Presbytery still had seventeen churches; in 1860 it had only five.<sup>96</sup> The Synod of Western Reserve was also forced to refuse a request to withdraw from the Assembly in September, 1847.<sup>97</sup> Since many of the churches in that body were Congregational in form, it was easy for them to change their connections. A student of the Western

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<sup>95</sup>AHMS Papers, Letter Book X, No. 2050, Charles Hall to illegible correspondent, March 18, 1851.

<sup>96</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Grand River, Ohio, 1836-1849, II, 20, 46, 273, 280, 278-279, 282, 291; III, 179.

<sup>97</sup>Records of the Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 33, 37.

Reserve has called Congregationalism "among the most potent forces ... at work" against the institution on the Reserve but claims it was held back by its connection with Presbyterianism.<sup>98</sup> But Nahum Gould, the clerk of the Presbytery of Ottawa in the 1840's and 1850's, claimed "slavery was made a pretext for separation" and for the refusal of the Presbyterian polity.<sup>99</sup> The Congregationalists in the West were becoming more denominationally minded. In July, 1846, at Michigan City, Indiana, for the first time a general Western Congregational Convention was held. This convention asserted that the "spread of genuine Congregationalism" was an effective method of promoting the work of emancipation.<sup>100</sup> In the Synod of Indiana, it was necessary to vote down a measure looking toward separation from the Assembly if it did not take steps to remove the system of human bondage from the church.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Geiser, op. cit., 79.

<sup>99</sup>Gould, op. cit., 89.

<sup>100</sup>Minutes of the Western Congregational Convention Held in Michigan City, Indiana, July 30 - August 3, 1846.  
Cited by Muelder, op. cit., 294.

<sup>101</sup>Watchman, November 18, 25, December 9, 1847.  
Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1846-1857, II, 32-35.  
Gould, op. cit., 254-55.

While the Presbytery of Lewes left the Assembly immediately after the meeting in 1846<sup>102</sup> because it opposed any consideration of the problem by the highest judicatory, the Presbytery of Ripley did not establish its proposed Anti-Slavery Presbyterian Church until after the Assembly of 1847 had failed to take stronger action. In July, 1846, Ripley published a statement that it could hold no relation with the parent body which "implied fellowship" until all constitutional means had been used "to purge itself from slavery," and would consult with sister units on the propriety of forming an anti-slavery Presbyterian Church. The following week it issued a call for a convention to meet in Cincinnati following the Assembly of 1847, to establish the new church. On October 10, 1846, Judge S.C. Stevens issued a call for a meeting of Evangelical Christians to convene in Cincinnati, concurrently with the Ripley meeting, "to devise means of action against slavery." The Synod of Cincinnati declared the proceedings of Ripley unconstitutional, but the Presbytery pursued its course and set up the Free Presbyterian Synod.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>New York Observer, July 25, August 15, December 18, 1846; Western Herald, August 12, 1846.

<sup>103</sup>Watchman, July 9, 16, November 12, 19, 26, 31, December 11, 1846; January 21, August 5, October 28, 1847.

In the West the "Constitutional" Presbyterians also worked against servitude beyond the bounds of the Church. In October, 1846, a Christian Anti-Slavery Convention met at Granville, Illinois, and passed a series of strong resolutions that were addressed to all denominations. The usual stand of non-fellowship was affirmed. Presbyterians attached to the "Constitutional" Assembly made up a strong contingent of those attending. Flavel Bascom of the Third Presbyterian Church of Chicago, chairman of the resolutions committee, was one of the most influential members of the convention.<sup>104</sup> Bascom was also chairman of the resolutions committee of the Western Presbyterian and Congregational Convention which met in Chicago in June, 1847.<sup>105</sup> New School Presbyterian anti-slavery men held a convention in southern Illinois in October, 1847, and adopted measures, but rejected a resolution sanctioning the Wilmot Proviso.<sup>106</sup> Presbyterian and Congregational churches in Portage, Summit, and Medina counties in Ohio summoned a convention that convened at Akron, in February of 1847, to consider the problem of human

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<sup>104</sup> Western Citizen, November 3, 1846; Western Herald, November 3, 11, 1846.

<sup>105</sup> Watchman, July 15, 1847; Ohio Observer, July 14, 1847; Western Citizen, July 13, 1847.

<sup>106</sup> National Era, October 28, 1847.



bondage. Non-fellowship measures were adopted and the Assembly was asked to declare itself on the institution. The Christian Observer of March 12, 1847, censured the convention.<sup>107</sup> The Watchman of the Valley was blamed for the development of "the divisive tendencies in the 'Constitutional' Church in the West." A writer accused the editor of urging all of the Presbytery of Ripley to go with the seceders.<sup>108</sup> A letter to the Christian Observer felt that the Watchman had "contributed little or nothing to the support and diffusion of the principles of sound Presbyterianism" because it was "endeavoring to meet the views of Congregationalists and ultra-abolitionists."<sup>109</sup>

Before the triennial meeting of 1849 many of the Western judicatories called for progress either by declaring human servitude a sin requiring discipline or by sending down a declaration asking the sessions and presbyteries

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<sup>107</sup> Cited by Ohio Observer, March 31, 1847; February 10, 24, 1847.

<sup>108</sup> Watchman, June 10, 1847.

<sup>109</sup> Cited by Presbyterian of the West, March 30, 1848.

to commence discipline of slaveholders.<sup>110</sup> The Presbytery of Ottawa instructed its commissioner to withdraw in the name of the Presbytery if measures were not taken to free the Church of the institution.<sup>111</sup> A memorial, set up by fourteen elders and sixteen ministers from the Middle West, asked the Church to "declare plainly and unequivocally" that human bondage was an offense requiring discipline. The Assembly should "recommend to the lower judicatories to take immediate action." The Church was requested to restore the note taken out of the Larger Catechism in 1816 which made slavery a violation of the eighth commandment, or to send the proposition down to the presbyteries.<sup>112</sup>

The Assembly received nineteen documents on the problem of human bondage, embracing memorials from thirteen presbyteries and four Middle Western synods. All of the documents asked that the Church be freed from the system.

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<sup>110</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Cincinnati, 1844-1870, II, 171; Crawfordsville, 1835-1868, 316, 325; Trumbull, 1847-1861, II, 86. Records of the Synods of: Illinois, 1831-1855, I, 336; Ohio, 1838-1848, I, 211-213; Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 68. Synod of Cincinnati: New York Observer, November 18, 1848. Presbytery of Knox: Assembly Minutes, 1849, 179.

<sup>111</sup>Gould, op. cit., 38.

<sup>112</sup>New York Evangelist, May 24, 1849. Liberator, June 15, 1849.

The report that was accepted reaffirmed all previous acts and stated that there were evils connected with servitude which could not be neglected without guilt. These "should be corrected by discipline." But there was no information before the Assembly to show that members in the South were not doing all that they could "to bring about emancipation."<sup>113</sup> An amendment, by G.W. Bassett, of the Presbytery of Ottawa, which declared this sin "should be treated ... as other gross immoralities," was voted down. This proposed amendment represented the position of the West.<sup>114</sup>

Speaking of the two Presbyterian Assemblies of 1849, the Western Citizen questioned: "How many have felt their hearts bleed, their souls sicken, until all confidence is lost, at the tardiness and even wicked indifference" of these bodies?<sup>115</sup> The New York Observer warned judicatories in the North, which were about to act on the problem of the relation of servant and master, to "weigh the matter well, and take no position that they are not able to maintain from the word of God, and with the concurrence of the most stable

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<sup>113</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1849, 188.

<sup>114</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1849, 184-188.

<sup>115</sup> Western Citizen, June 19, 1849.

minded men in the community."<sup>116</sup> Joel Parker, one of the leading Presbyterian clergymen of New York, warned in a sermon that "censuring the master" and "bitter words" would accomplish nothing. An "appeal to the benevolence of our Southern brethren" was the only course that could secure results.<sup>117</sup> The Herald of the Prairie saw the Assembly as failing to rid itself of those practicing slaveholding because "their discipline is limited to cases of 'cruel treatment.'" The mere fact that a man is held as a slave proves that he is not well treated as a man," concluded the editor.<sup>118</sup>

In October of 1849 the Synod of Utica hailed the measures adopted by the Church that year as a step forward.<sup>119</sup> But in the Middle West, the Synod of Illinois was forced to beat down an effort to separate from the Church,<sup>120</sup> and the majority of the Presbytery of Ottawa voted itself out

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<sup>116</sup>New York Observer, July 28, 1849.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid. Presbyterian of the West, August 23, 1849.

<sup>118</sup>Herald of the Prairie, July 18, 1849.

<sup>119</sup>New York Observer, October 20, 1849.

<sup>120</sup>Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855, I,



of the body.<sup>121</sup> Threats of secession were made by the Presbyteries of Fort Wayne, and Indianapolis, as well as the Synod of Western Reserve.<sup>122</sup> The Indiana Christian Herald, of Crawfordsville, tried to calm the agitation by printing an account of the transformation taking place in the South that looked toward the abolition of slavery.<sup>123</sup> The Christian Observer, through a correspondent, took the Synod of Western Reserve and the Presbytery of Indianapolis to task in an article entitled: "Are They Presbyterians?" "Are they sincerely attached to the Form of Government and Book of Discipline of the Presbyterian Church?" asked the writer. He said the Church needed purging and suggested that the Synod withdraw. The Ohio Observer defended these two bodies.<sup>124</sup> Other judicatories in the West defeated resolutions to withdraw, condemned the measures of the

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<sup>121</sup>Gould, op. cit., 39-42. Liberator, November 30, 1849. Anti-Slavery Bugle, December 15, 1849. Independent, November 22, 1849.

<sup>122</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Indianapolis, 1839-1863, I, 167-70. Crawfordsville Herald, September 13, 1849. Central Watchman, October 5, 1849. Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1846-1857, II, 78-84. Presbytery of Fort Wayne: Evangelical Repository, VIII, No. 65 (November, 1849), 284. New York Evangelist, October 11, 1849.

<sup>123</sup>Indiana Christian Herald, July 17, 1849.

<sup>124</sup>Cited in Independent, October 25, 1849; Ohio Observer, November 28, 1849.

highest judicatory, or asked for more positive measures in 1850.<sup>125</sup>

During the early months of 1850 the question of secession was debated in Western Reserve. The Ohio Observer ran a three column editorial on the inexpediency of leaving the Church, and the debate continued for months in the Observer.<sup>126</sup> As a compromise between the forces involved, a correspondent suggested that the churches withdraw and form an independent Presbyterian and Congregational Synod.<sup>127</sup> A ministers' meeting on secession was held at Norwalk, Ohio, where it was urged that the presbyteries meet the "question in a calm and fearless manner." A speaker observed that "of the one hundred and forty ministers connected with the Synod of Western Reserve not one ... can be found who does not deplore the existence" of slavery. Not one church "would tolerate in its communion and fellowship a member who should be known to buy or sell, for the purpose of gain, a fellow

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<sup>125</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Franklin, 1846-1860, 117-20; Cleveland, 1847-1870, 42-46; Trumbull, 1847-1861, II, 112, 124; Hamilton, 1847-1868, 64-65, 75, 80-81, 83; Pataskala, 1848-1870, II, 36. A.C. Crist, The History of Marion Presbytery, Its Churches, Elders, Ministers, Missionary Societies (Delaware, Ohio: Delaware Gazette, 1908), 45. Presbyteries of Athens, Logansport, and Fort Wayne: Central Christian Herald, April 25, May 2, 9, 1850.

<sup>126</sup>Ohio Observer, February 20, 1850.

<sup>127</sup>Cited in New York Evangelist, March 14, 1850.

creature."<sup>128</sup> When the Assembly met in May, 1850, nineteen memorials had been submitted to it. Two were from synods -- Western Reserve and Indiana -- and thirteen were from presbyteries. When the committee on slavery made its report, Duffield, the chairman, presented the majority report, and Wisner that of the minority. Both left the question of the sin of slaveholding to the presbyteries and sessions. The minority statement was more concise, brief and energetic.<sup>129</sup> Wisner had attended the "anti-slavery caucus held by a few members from Ohio, Indiana, and New York, and thought he could harmonize the views of all by a few bold vague general resolutions."<sup>130</sup> During the debate W.C. Clark, of Western Reserve, warned that if no action were taken, "a large number" would leave the body. "There exists in Ohio," he cautioned, "a free Synod, and there may exist a free Assembly, and by the two mill-stones, the new Assembly and the Congregationalists, this Assembly will be ground to powder."<sup>131</sup> J.C. Stiles, of the Third Presbytery

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<sup>128</sup>Ohio Observer, February 20, 1850.

<sup>129</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1850, 310-311; New York Observer, June 1, 1850.

<sup>130</sup>George Duffield Diary, V, May 26, 1850, 49.

<sup>131</sup>New York Observer, June 8, 1850.



of New York, made a very effective speech in defense of the South. "Men who dwell south of Mason and Dixon's line have done more to convert the heathen than the whole world beside," he informed the Assembly. He made a devastating attack on abolitionism before he left the floor. Seventeen conservatives, almost all from the East, requested that he print it.<sup>132</sup> A writer to the Southern Presbyterian called Stiles' speech "the ablest defense of the South" that he had yet seen.<sup>133</sup> The Washington Daily Union, a strong advocate of the union movement, called the speech one of "the most able and unanswerable arguments in favor of Divine truth."<sup>134</sup>

The minority report was amended and adopted with only sixteen votes (all Southern) against it. It pronounced slavery, except in "unavoidable" cases, an offense requiring the discipline of the Church. Since the presbyteries and sessions were "the courts of primary jurisdiction ... the whole subject of slavery "as it existed in the Church was referred to them to take

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<sup>132</sup> Joseph C. Stiles, Speech on the Slavery Resolutions, Delivered in the General Assembly Which Met in Detroit in May Last (Washington, D.C.: Jonathan T. Towers, 1850), 29-30, 42-44.

<sup>133</sup> Cited in the Independent, September 26, 1850.

<sup>134</sup> Daily Union, December 17, 1850.



such measures "as in their judgement the laws of Christianity require."<sup>135</sup>

After the division of 1837-1838, the "Reformed" Assembly remained relatively free of controversy in its annual meetings. By and large, the question of servitude remained a topic of amiable discussion at the lower levels of the church courts; but in September, 1839, the Presbytery of Chillicothe passed resolutions that it could not hold fellowship with those who treat men as property, or with any presbytery or synod that justified the practice.<sup>136</sup> When the record of this action came before the Synod of Cincinnati, it was declared "unscriptural and unconstitutional." The Presbytery was "required ... to reconsider ... and rescind" these measures.<sup>137</sup> Chillicothe refused to rescind the acts, but clarified them by stating that the resolutions applied to ecclesiastical bodies which justified slavery by scripture and did not exercise discipline as for other sins.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1850, 325. (New School)

<sup>136</sup>Philanthropist, October 22, 1839. Galbraith, op. cit., 147.

<sup>137</sup>Records of the Synod of Cincinnati, 1839-1843, I, 13, 15-16. In 1842 the Presbytery of St. Clairsville asked a church to repeal a similar rule: Records of the Presbytery of St. Clairsville, 1839-1849, I, 112-13, 123-24.

<sup>138</sup>Philanthropist, December 31, 1839.

The Synod of Cincinnati accepted Chillicothe's interpretation that the resolutions were not immediately intended to excommunicate all presbyteries involved in the Southern institution. The Synod itself, in 1841, enjoined the exercise of discipline against those justifying slavery, but added an amendment that immediate emancipation was not universally desirable.<sup>139</sup> The Synod of Pittsburgh tabled a memorial in 1839 to separate from communion those guilty of slaveholding and overruled the Presbytery of Beaver and one of its churches which had required the pastor to spend part of his time exposing the evils of slavery. The Synod, however, reaffirmed the Acts of 1818. After 1839 the Synod either refused to consider memorials concerning servitude or referred petitioners to its action of that year.<sup>140</sup> In the bounds of the Synod of Pittsburgh the Presbytery of Ohio removed a minister from the Church for assailing the Presbytery in an article on slavery in the Christian Witness in 1841. The Presbytery of St. Clairsville secured the dismissal of a minister in 1844 and another in 1846 for similar statements in the Liberty Courier and in the Liberty

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<sup>139</sup>Records of the Synod of Cincinnati, 1839-1843, I, 73-77, 93-94, 103-105.

<sup>140</sup>Presbyterian Advocate, November 9, 11, 1840, November 3, 1841, October 1, 1845.

Advocate.<sup>141</sup> The Synod of Illinois, in 1842, overruled a decision of the Presbytery of Peoria to the effect that a session should not ask for the immediate abandonment of the practice of buying and selling men for gain, but the next year the Synod sustained the Presbytery in its rule that modern abolitionism should not be introduced into a pulpit where the pastor and congregation opposed it.<sup>142</sup>

The "Reformed" Assembly indefinitely postponed consideration of the question of human bondage in 1841, and in 1842 rejected resolutions from the Presbyteries of Oxford and Chillicothe asking for measures to enforce the Acts of 1818.<sup>143</sup> In 1843 another memorial was sent up by Chillicothe but was tabled along with the petition of the previous year.<sup>144</sup> The Watchman of the Valley classified such action

<sup>141</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Ohio, 1835-1843, VII, 193, 291, 304-305. Records of the Presbytery of St. Clairsville, 1839-1849, I, 176-79, 190, 251-56.

<sup>142</sup>Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855, 90-91, 96-97. For similar action see: Records of the Presbytery of Richland, 1833-1850, II, 330-32.

<sup>143</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1841, IX, 419; X, 16, 18. New York Observer, May 28, 1842.

<sup>144</sup>Galbraith, op. cit., 161-63. New York Observer, May 27, 1843.



as an application of the "gag law,"<sup>145</sup> and Chillicothe denounced it as "protecting ... criminals from the censure of the Church."<sup>146</sup> Following the general convocation of the Church, the Synod of Cincinnati met and witnessed the much publicized debate between George Junkin and Thomas E. Thomas. Junkin spoke for eight hours against abolitionism after R.H. Bishop had introduced anti-slavery resolutions. Thomas gave an effective answer, but the whole matter was indefinitely postponed.<sup>147</sup> Junkin's speech was printed and became one of the most powerful Northern religious statements against abolitionism. It was a factor in securing his election as moderator of the Church in 1844, but made him so controversial that he was forced to retire from Miami University.<sup>148</sup> The opinions expressed by Junkin were

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<sup>145</sup> Watchman, May 11, 1843.

<sup>146</sup> Presbyterian, October 7, 1843.

<sup>147</sup> Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1839-1843, 764-69, 184-89, 204-205. David X. Junkin, A Historical Biography of George Junkin (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1871), 440-41. George Junkin, The Integrity of Our National Union V.S. Abolitionism: An Argument From the Bible (Cincinnati: R.P. Donogh, 1843). Thomas, op. cit., 37.

<sup>148</sup> Philanthropist, October 2, 1844. David Junkin, op. cit., 456, 459. Thomas, op. cit., 64. Presbyterian, September 28, 1844.



characterized by the Princeton Review as the judgment of "the great body of the intelligent and pious men of the Country."<sup>149</sup>

By 1844 the Western judicatories became concerned because of the failure of the majority of the Old School Assembly to permit a full discussion of the slavery question. This problem was discussed in the Synods of Cincinnati, Indiana, and Northern Indiana.<sup>150</sup> In 1843 Northern Indiana became the first synod to petition the Assembly on slavery. The Synod of Illinois had rejected requests to memorialize the parent body in 1841 and 1844, and that of Pittsburgh had refused the same in 1839.<sup>151</sup> When the general church body failed to take action in 1844, nine delegates entered a protest on the records.<sup>152</sup> The anti-slavery members of the Presbytery of Beaver, Pennsylvania, opened

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<sup>149</sup>Princeton Review, XVI, No. 4 (October, 1844), 551. George Junkin Papers (Manuscript: Miami University Library, Oxford, Ohio), Junkin to Joel Collins, Easton, Pennsylvania, November 8, 1844.

<sup>150</sup>New York Observer, November 9, 1844. Thomas, op. cit., 65. Records of the Synod of Cincinnati, 1844-1864, IV, 19-20, 35-39.

<sup>151</sup>Records of the Synod of Northern Indiana, 1843-1864, I, 26. Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855, 54, 118. Presbyterian Advocate, November 13, 1839.

<sup>152</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1844, 367.

correspondence with those of the same stamp in the Presbytery of Chillicothe on the expediency of establishing a new organization.<sup>153</sup>

When the "Reformed" Assembly met in 1845, memorials were presented from the Presbyteries of Chillicothe, Ohio, and Donnegal, Pennsylvania, and from corresponding bodies in Scotland, Ireland and New Hampshire.<sup>154</sup> The measures adopted by the Church, over the negative vote of thirteen delegates, declared "that since Christ and his inspired apostles did not make the holding of slaves a bar to communion, we, as a court of Christ, have no authority to do so." Although it recognized and denounced evils often attached to slavery, the report stated that "modern abolitionism ..., so far from removing the evils complained of, tend only to perpetuate and aggravate them."<sup>155</sup> During the session, James H. Thornwell, a delegate from South Carolina, wrote his wife that he, although not a member of the committee to draw up the resolutions on slavery, had submitted a paper to the group. Before he closed the letter he added a postscript: "The committee did not adopt my

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<sup>153</sup>Thomas, op. cit., 63.

<sup>154</sup>Watchman, May 22, 1845. New York Observer, June 7, 14, 1845. Assembly Minutes, 1845, 13, 30, 34.

<sup>155</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1845, 17.

report fully ..., but will bring in one that takes nearly the same position, one which vindicates the South, and will put the question at rest."<sup>156</sup> The Signal of Liberty observed that the question had been disposed of in twenty minutes without any discussion whatever.<sup>157</sup> "Deep regret" was expressed by the Associate Synod of North America that the Old School Assembly adopted resolutions that had "a direct tendency to encourage the slaveholder and his abettor."<sup>158</sup> The Watchman of the Valley said the Assembly had a false issue, and the Presbytery of Beaver echoed this sentiment.<sup>159</sup> The Presbytery of Blairsville, Pennsylvania, considered the measures of 1845 to be in harmony with those of 1818, but, since many did not, the Assembly was asked to reaffirm the position of 1818.<sup>160</sup> Most of the judicatories that considered the action of 1845 felt that

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<sup>156</sup> B.M. Palmer, The Life and Letters of James Henley Thornwell (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1875), 286-87. The 13 votes against the Assembly resolutions were all cast by Western delegates.

<sup>157</sup> Signal of Liberty, July 21, 1845.

<sup>158</sup> Evangelical Repository, IV, No. 1 (June, 1845), 35.

<sup>159</sup> Watchman, June 5, 1845. New York Observer, November 1, 1845.

<sup>160</sup> Presbyterian Advocate, April 22, 1846.



there had been no backward step, and that the Acts of 1818 had not been nullified.<sup>161</sup>

An Old School Convention had met at Hamilton, Ohio, in 1844, to propose anti-slavery resolutions to the Cincinnati convocation of the Church. A convention also met early in 1845 in the bounds of the Presbytery of Chillicothe and resolved to withdraw from the Church if it was not immediately freed from connection with human bondage.<sup>162</sup> After the Church had adopted the new acts of 1845, another convention met in Cincinnati and voted against withdrawing, but agreed on a convention to meet at Alleghany, Pennsylvania, to draw up resolutions to present to the Church in 1846.<sup>163</sup> Another convention met at Mt. Pleasant, Ohio, and protested the measures adopted in 1845. The Alleghany meeting asked the Assembly to reaffirm the Acts of 1818.<sup>164</sup> Churches at Greenfield and Red Oak petitioned the Presbytery of Chillicothe to withdraw,

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<sup>161</sup>Records of the following: Presbytery of Crawfordsville, 1839-1854, 247; Synod of Cincinnati, 1844-1864, IV, 85-99; Synod of Wheeling, 1841-1849, I, 177-78; Presbytery of Ohio, 1843-1850, VIII, 146, 149-50; Presbytery of Maumee, 1842-1852, II, 100. Presbytery of Sangamon, Illinois: Norton, op. cit., 362.

<sup>162</sup>Presbyterian, March 15, 22, 1845.

<sup>163</sup>Philanthropist, May 21, 1845. Anti-Slavery Bugle, June 5, 1846. John W. Scott Papers (Manuscript, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio), J.W. Scott to Convention, May 13, 1845; Scott to T.E. Thomas, May 12, 1845.

<sup>164</sup>Presbyterian, September 6, 1845. Presbyterian Advocate, April 27, May 27, 1846.



but this request was refused. A protest against sending commissioners to the Assembly was also refused.<sup>165</sup>

When the general convocation of the Church met at Philadelphia in 1846, memorials were received from the Associations of New Hampshire and the Presbyterian Church of Canada lamenting the action in 1845. The Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Ireland as well as the General Associations of Connecticut and Massachusetts, asked the Assembly to deal adequately with the problem of human bondage. The Presbyteries of Beaver, Blairsville, Hocking, and Lisbon, Ohio, and Albany, New York, petitioned the Church concerning servitude.<sup>166</sup> The Philadelphia meeting adopted a declaration that the measures of 1845 were not to be understood as having rescinded any previous testimony.<sup>167</sup> The Southern Presbyterian Review characterized the Presbyterian Church as having "the wisdom given her to

<sup>165</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Chillicothe, 1846-1860, IV, 15-18. Galbraith, op. cit., 167-69.

<sup>166</sup>Princeton Review, XXII, No. 3 (July, 1846), 421. Evangelical Repository, V, No. 2 (July, 1846), 71-75. New York Observer, July 5, 12, 1845; May 30, 1846. Assembly Minutes, 1846, 206.

<sup>167</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1846, 206.

understand the progress of events and to keep fully abreast of the age."<sup>168</sup>

The minority of the Presbytery of Mahoning withdrew from the Old School in 1847 because of slavery, and became the Free Presbytery of Mahoning. They had been aggrieved by the decision of 1845, and withdrew when the Assembly insisted, in answer to letters from Presbyterian bodies in Scotland and Ireland, that the Old School position on slavery had been "deliberately and conscientiously taken."<sup>169</sup> Mahoning became a part of the Free Presbyterian Church of America and continued to receive anti-slavery members from the Old School Presbyteries in the upper Ohio Valley: E.H. Nevin from Richland, T.M. Finney of Coshocton, James Robertson of New Lisbon, Thomas Merrill and George Gordon of St. Clairsville.<sup>170</sup> The Presbytery of Ripley received secessions from Sidney and Chillicothe until it was necessary to divide Ripley by forming the Presbytery of

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<sup>168</sup>Wilson, op. cit., III, 710.

<sup>169</sup>Evangelical Repository, VI, No. 10 (March, 1848), 495-500.

<sup>170</sup>Records of the Free Presbytery of Mahoning, 1847-1855, 28, 34, 38, 48. Records of the Presbytery of St. Clairsville, 1839-1849, 312-15. New York Observer, July 1, 1848. New York Evangelist, January 31, 1850. Presbyterian of the West, September 27, 1849.

Hillsboro.<sup>171</sup> The Free Presbyterian Church continued to grow until it covered an area from Pennsylvania to Iowa with over sixty churches. It drew mainly from the Old School with over two-thirds of its ministers coming from the ranks of this Church and it remained a thorn in the flesh of this group through the years.<sup>172</sup> The "Reformed" Assembly, however, stood its ground and refused to alter its position of 1845. In 1849 the United Presbyterian, organ of the Associate Reformed Church of the West, observed the lack of discussion in the Old School Church on the Southern institution. "Is there not a vast amount of smothered dissent, which will sooner or later burst forth with eruptive power?" questioned the editor.<sup>173</sup> But the Southern Presbyterian Review answered, "So clear and triumphant do we consider the argument on the side of the South, that where it has failed to convince we believe further discussion to be useless."<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup>Free Presbyterian, April 23, 1853. E.B. Welsh, Wrestling with Human Values: The Slavery Years, in They Seek a Country: The American Presbyterians Some Aspects, edited by G.J. Slosser (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 228.

<sup>172</sup>Welsh, op. cit., 229. Charles Hodge Papers (Manuscript: Princeton University Library, Princeton, New Jersey), J.E. Alexander to Charles Hodge, August 23, 1851.

<sup>173</sup>United Presbyterian, III, No 4 (August, 1849), 183.

<sup>174</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, III, No. 3 (January, 1850), 367.



The small groups of doctrinal conservative Presbyterians had largely solved the problem of the relation of the Church to slavery before the rise of abolitionism as a reform movement. The Associate Synod of North America had directed members to free their slaves as early as 1811. Those who did not comply were considered unworthy of fellowship. The more stringent Act of 1831 excluded forthwith from communion all who held men in bondage. In 1840 a letter was addressed to members in the South. It made allowance for those who could not emancipate servants because of civil laws, provided they agreed to a moral emancipation. The moderator went into the South to read the letter to the congregations. When a riot occurred in a church, the Presbytery of South Carolina declared itself independent. Thus by 1840 the Associate Church was free of slavery.<sup>175</sup> In 1845 the Church sent a pastoral letter to its members warning them against voting for slaveholders.<sup>176</sup>

The Associate Reformed Church was separated into

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<sup>175</sup>James B. Scouller, A History of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, Vol. XI of American Church History (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1949), 178-79. New York Evangelist, July 20, 1839. Evangelical Repository, IV, No. 8 (January, 1846), 369-71.

<sup>176</sup>Evangelical Repository, IV, No. 3 (June, 1845), 23, 32, 37.



synods of the West, of the South, and of New York during the 1830's as a result of the difficulties of convening as a united church court. The only relation between these groups became that of separate corresponding bodies. In 1830 the Synod of the West passed resolutions requiring that all slaves be set free where state regulations allowed. A letter of warning was issued in 1832 explaining the measures. The action of 1830 was clarified in 1838 by a statement that masters should put emancipation into effect as soon as servants were not liable to be seized and sold into bondage.<sup>177</sup> In 1837 both the Synod and the Presbytery of Ohio ruled that in receiving members from the South these members should be questioned concerning their relations to the Southern institution. The Presbytery declared that churches should exclude from communion "those who live in the practice of sin whether ... tolerated or sanctioned by the civil law or not. We should see that our sanctuary is cleansed from this sin."<sup>178</sup> The Presbytery of Indiana, in

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<sup>177</sup>United Presbyterian, II, No. 4 (August, 1848), 168; No. 7 (November, 1848), 307-308. Scouller, op. cit., 218. Christian Intelligencer, XII (June, 1841), 21-36.

<sup>178</sup>Christian Intelligencer and Evangelical Guardian, VIII (December, 1837), 376-77. Extracts from the Minutes of the Associate Reformed Synod of the West, October 18, 1837 (Hamilton, Ohio: I.M. Walters, 1837), 7.

1839, rejected a colony from the South because of its views on servitude; and when a Second Synod of the West was formed, this body interpreted the Standards as making slavery a term of communion by sending two commissioners into Kentucky to visit a congregation and administer the Lord's Supper to those they found qualified according to the regulations of the Standards.<sup>179</sup>

The Associate Reformed Synod of New York contained churches in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Memorials on slavery came before this body as early as 1837, but were rejected. A similar course was followed down through the years. A memorial from the Presbytery of Philadelphia was rejected in 1851 by a report which stated: "As there is no slavery within the bounds of this Synod, any testimony ... would be as unavailing for good as a testimony against idolatrous practices in India or China .... Slavery is an institution wholly under the control of civil authority."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Christian Intelligencer, X (January, 1840), 428; XII (January, 1842), 346-47.

<sup>180</sup> Resolutions were rejected in the following years at least: 1839, 1840, 1841, 1849, 1850. Scouller, op. cit., 210-11. Christian Magazine, IX, No. 8 (August, 1840), 272; X, No. 7 (July, 1841), 225. Evangelical Repository, VIII, No. 3 (August, 1849), 130-31; IX, No. 5 (October, 1850), 247-248; X, No. 4 (September, 1851), 212. Presbyterian Advocate, July 30, September 10, 1851.

In 1842 the Associate Reformed Synod of the West made an overture to the Associate Church for an organic union. A series of conventions was held with this view in mind. During the convention of 1842 measures were adopted making slavery a censurable offense that should be included in the Standards of the United Church. The Synod of the West and the Associate Church supported this measure, but all of the delegates from the Associate Reformed Synod of New York voted against the resolutions.<sup>181</sup> In 1846 a convention agreed that the civil relations of master and servant could be held without involvement in sin, and on this basis the northern Associate Reformed Churches were united in 1855 as a General Synod.<sup>182</sup> At a convention in 1852 the Associate Reformed Synod of the West concurred with the Associate Church in adding slaveholding to the Larger Catechism as one of the sins against the eighth commandment. That human bondage "under certain circumstances" was justifiable was an error.<sup>183</sup> In 1858 when the General Synod

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<sup>181</sup>Christian Magazine, XI, No. 6 (August, 1842), 207. Evangelical Repository, I, No. 1 (June, 1842), 46-47.

<sup>182</sup>Evangelical Repository, V, No. 5 (October, 1846), 251; No. 9 (February, 1847), 463. Scouller, op. cit., 212.

<sup>183</sup>United Presbyterian, VI, No. 8 (December, 1852), 344. Evangelical Repository, XI, No. 3 (August, 1852), 151-58.

of the Associate Reformed Church united with the Associate Church to form the United Presbyterian Church, members of the Synod of New York objected to the article on slavery on the grounds that by setting up new tests of communion it violated "the compact by which the Associate Reformed Synod of New York united with the Synods of the West."<sup>184</sup>

Despite the fact that Theodore Weld found the Presbyterian Church rapidly becoming abolitionized in 1835,<sup>185</sup> the division of 1837 put the conservatives in control of both branches of the Church. This was the result of two factors: An awareness that the question of slavery would split the Church into fragments if any positive decision were reached, and the departure of many abolitionists from the Church during the early forties. Arthur Tappan turned to the Congregationalists and gave them his support, and Gerrit Smith gradually dropped his ties

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<sup>184</sup>Scouller, op. cit., 183. New York Observer, May 28, 1857.

<sup>185</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1850, 325.



with the Presbyterian Church, making his break complete in 1843.<sup>186</sup> Many turned from religion to political action to solve the problem of human bondage. Alvan Stewart wrote in 1841, "We have no choice ... left, but by a vigorous use of political power as a Christian duty to storm the castle of slavery. The church has refused the great and immortal honor of overthrowing this horrible power."<sup>187</sup> The press that sprang up to promote the Liberty Party was often strong in denouncing the Church. The Michigan Freeman, of Jackson, Michigan, compared the resolutions adopted by the Presbyterian Church on the question of servitude with the preaching of "teetotal temperance in a Temperance Society" and then being a "'hail fellow well met' around the social glass."<sup>188</sup> The Signal of Liberty said that testimony had been reiterated for

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<sup>186</sup> Lewis Tappan, The Life of Arthur Tappan (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), 238, 355. Ralph V. Harlow, Gerrit Smith, Philanthropist and Reformer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939), 202-205.

<sup>187</sup> Liberator, December 3, 1841.

<sup>188</sup> Michigan Freeman, October, 1840, No. 35.

years. What was needed now was "action ... immediately made effectual."<sup>189</sup>

As the abolitionists turned away from the Church, they became more severe in criticizing the failure of the Church to move with them. Stephen Foster, speaking of the Presbyterian Church, concluded, "No sect in the land has done more to perpetuate slavery than this."<sup>190</sup> William B. Brown, of Ohio, found that the churches, which admitted those who made chattel of man, were "exerting ... a direct, powerful and studied influence to harmonize slaveholding with their respective enterprises."<sup>191</sup> In 1847 the New York Evangelist lamented:

The foremost men ... in the vindication of the rights of man are men who make no profession ... The church has pusillanimously left not only the working oar, but the very reins of certain necessary reforms of the day in the hands of men who, if not inimical to Christianity, will be made so by Christianity's neglect of what is its proper mission to look after.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup>Signal of Liberty, May 5, 1841.

<sup>190</sup>Stephen S. Foster, The Brotherhood of Thieves or a True Picture of the American Church and Clergy (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Office, n.d.), 42.

<sup>191</sup>William B. Brown, Religious Organizations and Slavery (Oberlin: James M. Fitch, 1850), 4.

<sup>192</sup>Parker Pillsbury, The Church As It Is -- Or the Forlorn Hope of Slavery (2nd Ed., Concord, New Hampshire: Republican Press Association, 1885), 82.

In 1850, while observing the Presbyterian Church, Garrison could still claim, "The whole weight of it is on the side of oppression."<sup>193</sup> Even in the Church, Samuel E. Cornish, a colored Presbyterian minister and editor of the New York Colored American, charged that after seventeen years in New York, "The ministry with which we have been connected have failed, in all respects, to treat us as an Ambassador of Christ."<sup>194</sup> Albert Barnes, one of the most influential clergymen in the New School Church, admitted that the Christian Church did "much to sustain slaveholders in their own views."<sup>195</sup> A legislative committee in New York justified its failure to give civil rights to colored people by putting the blame on the Church, which it claimed was bound "to the car of the slave-power as its voluntary victims and tools."<sup>196</sup> Consciously and unconsciously, great

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<sup>193</sup>Garrison, op. cit., III, 289.

<sup>194</sup>Liberator, May 11, 1838.

<sup>195</sup>Albert Barnes, The Church and Slavery (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1857), 30. See Birney, American Churches, 46-48. Horace Greeley, The American Conflict: A History of the Great Rebellion in the United States of America, 1860-1865 (2 vols., Hartford: O.D. Case and Company, 1864), I, 121.

<sup>196</sup>Goodell, Slavery and Anti-Slavery, 215.

numbers of clergymen adopted the viewpoint of the leading members of their congregations, or as Samuel May phrased it, "The shepherds were driven by the sheep."<sup>197</sup>

While the clergy found it necessary to hear what the business world had to say, the mercantile interests of the great metropolises were obliged to listen to the voice of the great staple agricultural interests. After an anti-slavery meeting in the Houston Street Presbyterian Church in 1835, a conversation took place between Samuel May and a New York manufacturer which is revealing:

Mr. May, we are not such fools as not to know that slavery is a great evil .... But it was consented to by the founders of our Republic .... A great portion of the property of the Southerner is vested under its sanction; and the business of the North, as well as the South, has become adjusted to it. There are millions upon millions of dollars due from Southerners to the merchants and mechanics of this city alone, the payment of which would be jeopardized by any rupture between the North and the South. We cannot afford, sir, to let you and your associates succeed in your endeavor to overthrow

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<sup>197</sup> Samuel May, Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869), 329. See: Greeley, op. cit., I, 121. Oliver Johnson, William Lloyd Garrison and His Times (New York: B.B. Bussell, 1880), 43.



slavery. It is not a matter of principle with us. It is a matter of business necessity. We cannot afford to let you succeed.

May added that the manufacturer had not spoken for himself alone but for the entire commercial metropolis.<sup>198</sup> During the same year the New York Evangelist printed a speech given before the American Anti-Slavery Society in up-state New York:<sup>199</sup>

The merchants and ship owners in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia ... make large profits by the importation and sale of goods which are purchased and consumed by the people of the slave states .... They, therefore, are anxious to conciliate the feelings, and even flatter the prejudices of customers from whom they acquire great gain .... The influence of these bodies of men is felt by all professions. With several ... honorable exceptions, the Reverend clergy ... are desirous to soothe the feelings of the planter by a silent approval of his traffick [sic] in his fellow-man.

In 1847 Theodore Parker delivered a sermon on the subject of servitude. He found the merchants "blind to the evils of Slavery." Since "this class controls the churches," he continued, "the clergy ... are unconsciously bought up, their speech paid for, or their silence."<sup>200</sup> When the General

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<sup>198</sup> May, Recollections, 127-28.

<sup>199</sup> New York Evangelist, October 20, 1835.

<sup>200</sup> Liberator, January 22, 1847.

Assembly asked the presbyteries to rescind the non-fellowship rules, the Presbytery of Madison noticed one thing which it believed had some influence in bringing the General Assembly to that decision:<sup>201</sup>

The commercial interest of our Northern cities is so identified with the South by the purchases of Southern merchants, and the great amount of debts incurred by them, that a strong pro-slavery influence prevails in our Northern commercial cities.

The South showed an unwillingness to patronize those who opposed its economic arrangements. In 1835 the Presbytery of Georgia resolved that it would "countenance no minister -- nor merchant ... nor any other man" who held "the sentiments of Northern abolitionists."<sup>202</sup> That the South was selective in its business associates seemed to have been recognized in the North. When one of the members of Straight, Deming and Company, of Cincinnati, was listed as a contributor to a reward which had been given to a Cincinnati citizen who aided a fugitive from bondage, the newspaper containing a letter to which his name was attached was sent to merchants in the South who were doing business with the company.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup>Watchman, June 23, 1842.

<sup>202</sup>Charleston Observer, December 12, 1835.

<sup>203</sup>Liberator, May 9, 1856.

By and large, the religious press, particularly in the East, spoke with the voice of the conservative mercantile interests.<sup>204</sup> Count Agenor de Gasparin, a French clergyman, who visited in the United States before the Civil War, viewed the scene in much the same way as the abolitionists did. He was surprised to read sermons, listened to with approval in New York, which justified slavery. "I know the nature of that theology too truly styled cottony, which is displayed in the clerical columns of a weekly religious paper," he wrote, but added, "these revolting excesses seldom appear except in the sea ports, and especially in New York."<sup>205</sup> The Count was without doubt speaking of the New York Observer which was "the richest and most widely circulated" religious journal in the country.<sup>206</sup> The Observer had always been a moderating influence in the Church in dealing with Southern institutions. In 1837 Elijah Lovejoy had found "its columns hermetically sealed to all

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<sup>204</sup>O. D. Johnson, op. cit., 43. Garrison, op. cit., 478-79.

<sup>205</sup>Count Agenor de Gasparin, The Uprising of a Great People: The United States in 1861, translated by Mary L. Booth (4th Ed., New York: Charles Scribner, 1861), 76.

<sup>206</sup>New York Times, January 21, 1854.



reply or confutation."<sup>207</sup> The Journal of Commerce, in 1850, considered the Observer to be the only religious paper that was completely right on the sectional problems,<sup>208</sup> but to the abolitionists the religious papers were "the willing servants" of the merchants.<sup>209</sup> While the New York Evangelist was conducted with "admirable judgment ... candor, firmness, and ability," the New York Observer lacked "editorial power ... courage, and freedom of discussion,"<sup>210</sup> according to the New York Times. Garrison found the religious press in the North "filled with apologies for sin and sinners of the worst class." He said, except for the New York Evangelist, they were "preeminently corrupt and servile."<sup>211</sup> The Watchman and Reflector, of Boston, commented that the New York Observer "deprecated any unkind words, or harsh judgment, or rigid church discipline" concerning the South or its institutions.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Joseph C. Lovejoy and Owen Lovejoy, Memoir of the Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy (New York: John S. Taylor, 1838), 197. Elijah P. Lovejoy to Rev. Asa Cummings, February 9, 1837.

<sup>208</sup> Cited by Independent, June 13, 1850.

<sup>209</sup> O.D. Johnson, op. cit., 43.

<sup>210</sup> New York Times, January 21, 1854.

<sup>211</sup> Garrison, op. cit., 478-79.

<sup>212</sup> Watchman and Reflector, July 16, 1857.



In the West and, generally speaking, in the rural sections of the North, there was little interest in appeasing the South.<sup>213</sup> So far as the "Constitutional" Presbyterian Church was concerned, the West, almost as a unit, bitterly opposed human bondage. This attitude seemed to have come from two sources of influence that were exerted on the frontier. Scholars have recognized the existence of an overpowering frontier sense of sin and the accompanying fear of eternal punishment.<sup>214</sup> This was partially a product of the drab and monotonous life of the West that is evident in almost every report of western missionaries for the Home Missionary Society. As a result, the frontier churches were ready to do battle against sin without compromise. Their moral absolutes separated right from wrong without reference to the social consequences. Supplementing this was the frontier philosophy that made use of the Declaration of Independence to proclaim that one man was just as good as another. The western judicatories showed far more interest in improving the status of the Negro in the South than in

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<sup>213</sup> Adams, op. cit., 99-100. Weld-Grimké Letters, I, 287; Weld to Lewis Tappan, April 5, 1836. Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857, Dwight L. Dumond, ed., (2 vols., New York: D. Appleton, 1938), I, 271, 361: Birney to Charles Hammond, November 14, 1835; Charles Stuart to Birney, February, 1836.

<sup>214</sup> Merrill E. Gaddis, "Religious Ideas and Attitudes in the Early Frontier," Church History, II, No. 3 (September, 1933), 155.

working to elevate those in the Northwest. While the New School Presbyteries of Alton and Galena, and the Synods of Illinois and Peoria did express disapproval of the Illinois law which restricted the civil rights of Negroes,<sup>215</sup> the Old School action was limited to approving the efforts of the Church in the South to educate and evangelize the Negro.<sup>216</sup>

The Western church also found reason to complain against the holding of men as property because of its stifling economic effects.<sup>217</sup> It was said to be holding back the growth of the country and laying waste to industry. "It destroys or cripples agriculture, commerce, arts, Sciences, Schools and Colleges. It diminishes population, prevents national wealth and weakens the physical and

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<sup>215</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Galena, 1841-1863, 180; Alton, 1836-1850 (October, 1846, 223. Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855 (October, 1853), 412-416. Synod of Peoria: Evangelical Repository, II, No. 9 (January, 1844), 364. Presbytery of Alton: Presbytery Reporter, IV (May 1, 1853), 18. See Records of the Synod of Wabash, 1851-1869, 36-38. Bishop Papers, op. cit., W.L. McLain to Bishop, April 9, 1852.

<sup>216</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Crawfordsville, 1839-1854 (September, 1844), 214; (October, 1847), 333. St. Clairsville, 1839-1849, I (January, 1845), 186. For discussion in the Presbytery of New Lisbon see: Robinson, op. cit., 39.

<sup>217</sup>Presbytery of Indianapolis: Watchman of the Valley, April 23, 1846.

intellectual energy of the white Race," complained the Presbytery of Maumee.<sup>218</sup> The abolitionists and advocates of the Liberty Party developed this theme as effective propaganda in the West, where monetary credit was usually short. Joshua Leavitt, editor of the New York Evangelist, propagated this idea by many speeches throughout the West:<sup>219</sup>

Men who have lent money, or given their endorsements to others that have trusted their all to the South ... now cannot pay. And behind these another class and another, and another until there is hardly a remote hamlet in the free States that has not been directly or indirectly drained of its available capital by the southern debt.

His speech was widely printed in abolitionist and Liberty Party journals. "His remarks on the connection of slavery with the financial embarrassment of the country cannot be forgotten," wrote Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the Philanthropist.<sup>220</sup>

During the middle forties, sentiment was often expressed in the East that interference with slavery would

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<sup>218</sup> Records of the Presbytery of Maumee, 1836-1859, Old School, I, 105.

<sup>219</sup> Julian Bretz, "The Economic Background of the Liberty Party," American Historical Review, XXXIV (January, 1929), 254.

<sup>220</sup> Philanthropist, September 8, 1840.

endanger national prosperity, but in the Northwest expressions were more common that it was detrimental to economic development. But with the coming of the Mexican War, the Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, a transition was to gradually occur even in the attitude of the East toward the South. As early as 1850 the New York Herald reported that "the detestation of the Presbyterian Church is becoming as universal in the South as hatred to an abolitionist .... The Presbyterian, as a church, is the fountain-head of abolitionism." The merchants and men of business were advised to "frown down" the efforts of "religious lunatics" which would only "ruin and destroy ... prosperity" in the commercial center of New York.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup>Cited by Liberator, May 10, 1850.



### CHAPTER III

#### THE IMPACT OF THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW UPON THE CHURCH

The war with Mexico witnessed the beginning of a radical change in the attitude of the Church concerning slavery. Before the war there had been a strong tendency to retain a faith in the gradual amelioration and disappearance of servitude. The expansion and growth of the institution and the annexation of Texas dashed the hopes in the minds of all except the ultra-conservatives in the East. The abolitionist, George Julian, observed that, "The anti-slavery agitation of 1848 and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 brought large reinforcements to the cause of freedom .... The dullest scholars began to get their lessons."<sup>1</sup> The advanced position taken by the New School General Assembly of 1850 was adopted under the influence and impact of the debate in the Congress of the United States. This debate was given extensive coverage in the Detroit newspapers while the Assembly was in session in that city.

In the Middle West there already existed a deep-seated religious resistance to the return of fugitives long before the enactment of the Compromise of 1850. In September, 1843, the Presbytery of Elyria, Ohio, had instructed its

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<sup>1</sup>George W. Julian, "The Genesis of Northern Abolitionism," International Review, XII, No. 6 (June, 1882), 533-55, 554.

members that according to the prohibition of scripture they "ought not to be in any way instrumental in delivering the slave to his master."<sup>2</sup> In 1848, after the Mexican War, there was an acceleration of interest in those fleeing from the South who had, until then, been aided in relative quietness. The Presbytery of Monroe, Michigan, resolved that the voluntary arrest and re-delivery of servants "into bondage is inhuman, forbidden by the word of God, and ought to subject those engaged in it to disgrace and infamy; and if nominal Christians, to the discipline of the Church."<sup>3</sup>

Resolutions were sent up to the Synod of Illinois from the Presbyteries of Palestine and Alton requesting action on the conduct of certain members of the New School Presbyterian Church who were reported "to have been guilty of ... beguiling, and ... betraying, apprehending and returning to bondage men, women, and children who were endeavouring to gain their freedom." The Synod strongly condemned any aid in returning the fugitives, and promised, if necessary, to use its authority to bring such acts under the discipline of the Church. It was, however, observed that the church session, the proper authority in the case, had commenced action which, it was hoped, "would clear the Church from

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<sup>2</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 42.

<sup>3</sup>New York Observer, November 11, 1848.

the reproach of so infamous a transaction."<sup>4</sup> But the Pisgah, Illinois, Church, which was directly involved, did not move to take adequate discipline. The Presbytery of Springfield, in which the church was located, selected a committee to investigate the circumstance of the case, and this committee reported that the session of the church relied on the statement of the individual most deeply implicated in the arrest of the fugitives to exonerate himself. The Presbytery concluded that this procedure of testimony was "wholly inadmissible in ecclesiastical law." The session was not censured since there appeared to be "no disposition to sanction or connive at such unchristian conduct," but the Presbytery enjoined all its church sessions in the future to enforce, promptly and thoroughly, the discipline of the Church in every case of this kind that might arise.<sup>5</sup>

While Congress debated the Compromise of 1850, the Central Christian Herald reminded the lawmakers that "the 'sceptre of His kingdom is one of righteousness;' and that compromises which cover up injustice and oppression, He will

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<sup>4</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Alton, 1836-1850, I, 178-79, 185. Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855, I, 334-35.

<sup>5</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Springfield, 1840-1856, III, 163, 167, 169-71.



not recognize and approve."<sup>6</sup> The New York Observer, in reply to a clergyman from the South, reasoned that, "If the law of the land requires a man to violate the law of God, he must refuse to obey the law of the land; for the law of God is paramount to all other law." But the editor concluded that the number of men who believed the fugitive slave law violated God's law did not "form any considerable portion of the population."<sup>7</sup> Before a month had passed the New York Observer returned to the subject. The South was reminded that the Constitution worked both ways. "It was intended to secure, not only the right of the master to the service of his slave, but the right of the freeman to his own personal liberty." This liberty, South Carolina was denying to free Negroes who came there as sailors on Northern ships.<sup>8</sup> While discussing the proposed compromise and the fugitive slave law, the Christian Observer reminded its readers:<sup>9</sup>

God has assigned His Church a great and honorable work essential to the salvation of our country .... It can never be effected by exciting the people in one section of the land to rise against the social relations or usages of another. Interference in this way must be avoided.

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<sup>6</sup> Central Christian Herald, March 21, 1850.

<sup>7</sup> New York Observer, April 13, 1850.

<sup>8</sup> New York Observer, May 4, 1850.

<sup>9</sup> Christian Observer, June 29, 1850.



The New York Observer moved back to a neutral position by warning, "The position of the North is now so humiliating that we apprehend the spirit of her people will bear no more."<sup>10</sup> On April 12 the conservative New York Journal of Commerce came out with a devastating attack on the clergy, who opposed the Compromise of 1850, under the title of "Politics and the Pulpit." The Journal was owned by Gerard Hallock, a prominent Presbyterian layman. The editorial was written in response to a sermon by a New York Congregational minister who had attacked Webster for following the dictates of expediency. "Clergymen ought to understand, that while they attend to the proper duties of their calling, they will be respected, honored and beloved; but that if they descend to the arena of politics, their black coats will most likely be rolled in the dirt." The Journal went far in effectively crushing opposition to the Compromise from the Eastern pulpit. It had little to say for most religious journals, but high praise for the New York Observer.<sup>11</sup> The Texas Presbyterian, of Huntsville, Texas, found most of its religious exchanges opposing the Compromise. "If this Union should be overthrown," it concluded, "the religious press will have added much to this disastrous

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<sup>10</sup> New York Observer, June 15, 1850.

<sup>11</sup> Liberator, April 26, 1850. Independent, April 18, 25, May 11, 1850.

affair."<sup>12</sup> When the American Anti-Slavery Society scheduled its meeting in New York in 1850 with plans to oppose the Fugitive Slave Law proposals, the Syracuse Religious Recorder, a Presbyterian paper, advised that, "The chief of the Police ought to have cleared the Tabernacle, and to have carried Garrison and Rynders, par noble fratrum, to the magistrate." The abolitionist journals claimed that this type of attack by papers such as the Journal of Commerce, the New York Herald, and the New York Express had resulted<sup>13</sup> in mob violence against the meeting.

After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in September, 1850, the action of Presbyterian judicatories on this law became more frequent and determined. The Presbytery of Galena denounced the Act for violating "in its spirit and operations, the law of benevolence and mercy laid down in the Bible," and the Synod of Peoria adopted identical measures.<sup>14</sup> The First Presbyterian Church in Chicago held a meeting in December, 1850, and declared that it was "irreconcilably opposed to this law" and would "labor untiringly for its repeal." Even while it continued in force,

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<sup>12</sup>Cited by Chicago Daily Democrat, July 18, 1850.

<sup>13</sup>Cited by Liberator, May 31, 1850.

<sup>14</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Galena, 1841-1863, 132-33. Records of the Synod of Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 100.

they pledged they would not "obey its requirements or heed its prohibitions."<sup>15</sup> In the following spring the Presbytery of Belvidere asked the Assembly to express itself on the following questions: "Does the late law ... require individuals to violate the law of God? What is the duty of Christians in reference to obeying said law?"<sup>16</sup> Several other western judicatories denounced the act in uncompromising terms.<sup>17</sup> The Synod of New York-New Jersey took up the matter and pronounced obedience obligatory. It resolved to "leave the constitutionality of the recent enactment ... to be adjudicated by the civil tribunals of the country."<sup>18</sup> The Presbytery of Courtland, in western New York, said the law was at variance with the divine law and declared it would obey God rather than man.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Knoxville Journal, December 31, 1850. Chicago Daily Democrat, December 19, 1850.

<sup>16</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Belvidere, 1847-1863, 31. Ohio Observer, May 28, 1851.

<sup>17</sup>Presbytery Reporter, II, No. 1 (May 1, 1851), 19. Records of the Presbytery of Springfield, 1840-1856, III, 195. Records of the Presbytery of Grand River, 1849-1867, III, 54.

<sup>18</sup>Daily Union, December 11, 1850. Presbyterian Advocate, November 27, 1850. Independent, October 24, 1850. New York Observer, October 26, 1850.

<sup>19</sup>Daily Republican, March 8, 1851.



As resistance to the enactment grew, the lay press struck out at the opponents of the law. The New York Evening Post of November 18, 1850, in a long article called "Conscience and the Law," made an attack on the "political clergy." The Daily National Intelligencer condemned these clergymen for "cursing their country ... and urging their followers to treason, bloodshed, and civil war."<sup>20</sup> The New York Observer lamented that "If there had been a provision for trial by jury ... it would be more easily executed."<sup>21</sup> The Central Christian Herald reasoned:<sup>22</sup>

When we make concessions for the sake of peace, it becomes us to understand well what we concede -- whether it is our neighbor's rights and interests that we are giving up.

Answering the claim that even the constitutional provision concerning persons held in service violated the law of God, the New York Observer stated that there was "nothing in this article of the Constitution, nor ... necessarily anything in slavery itself contrary to the law of God." But the Observer felt wisdom dictated that the law should be amended so it would be "optional with the friends of the fugitive either to permit him to be taken by his master, or to pay for him

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<sup>20</sup> Daily National Intelligencer, November 21, 1850.

<sup>21</sup> New York Observer, October 5, 1850.

<sup>22</sup> Central Christian Herald, September 19, 1850.



at a fair valuation."<sup>23</sup> On December 7, 1850, the New York Observer returned to the subject of the constitutional provision. "We deny," said the editor, "that it is an immoral or wicked provision." The Central Christian Herald answered, "The Constitution of the United States, as far as it sanctions and protects legalized oppression, is so far inconsistent with the 'Higher Law' of the universe; and laws passed to carry out the provisions of the Constitution on this subject are morally wrong, and can never bind the conscience of men."<sup>24</sup> The Old School Presbyterian Advocate of Pittsburgh expressed its attitude by printing from one of its exchanges, "We have no faith in a man's patriotism or humanity when he deliberately resists, and recommends to others to resist and break the laws of his country."<sup>25</sup> "Is it ever right ... to resist the law?" asked the New York Observer. "Never ...," it said, "No plea of conscience can avail in such a case, for if conscience cannot obey, she can suffer the penalty."<sup>26</sup> While discussing the Fugitive Slave Law, the Presbyterian of the West, an Old School sheet,

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<sup>23</sup> New York Observer, October 19, 1850.

<sup>24</sup> Central Christian Herald, November 7, 1850.

<sup>25</sup> Presbyterian Advocate, December 4, 1850.

<sup>26</sup> New York Observer, November 30, 1850.

observed that the religious press was rapidly assuming a decided political character which would result in a loss of its power for good, commenting:<sup>27</sup>

Whenever ministers of the Gospel step aside from their proper sphere and become political declaimers, their power as ministers has been destroyed, and a deep wound has been inflicted upon the cause of religion.

A correspondent of the Presbyterian contrasted the peace and harmony in the "Reformed" Assembly with the disorder stirred up by the law in many other bodies. "Standing forth as a firm bulwark to hold in check the conflicting element of strife among brethren," said the writer, "it has incidentally served as an important pillar of national unity and strength." The Washington Union reprinted this article as a part of a more extensive account that included church action by many other groups on the political question.<sup>28</sup>

The Thanksgiving Day Observance in 1850 brought a flood of sermons on the Fugitive Slave Law. The eastern pulpits counselled obedience to the act. The clergymen of the Old School were unanimous in support of the new law, and

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<sup>27</sup> Presbyterian of the West, November 7, 1850.

<sup>28</sup> Presbyterian, November 9, 1850. Washington Union, November 14, 1850.

led the attack in defending it.<sup>29</sup> New School clergy from the East generally fell in line and firmly supported this position. A correspondent from Edinburgh, Scotland, wrote Samuel I. Prime, editor of the New York Observer, in 1861, that she was in the United States at the time the law was passed and was unhappy to learn that not one word "in defense of the slave" was spoken in the Thanksgiving Day sermons.<sup>30</sup> An informed correspondent to the New York Tribune observed that most of the sermons supported the

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<sup>29</sup> The following Old School men defended the law: David McKinney, Charles Wadsworth, H.A. Boardman, of Philadelphia; W.H. Green of Princeton Theological Seminary; John C. Lord of Buffalo; Robert Davidson of New Brunswick, New Jersey; John W. Yeomans of Danville, Pennsylvania; Gardiner Spring, George Potts, John M. Krebs, and Ichabod S. Spencer, of New York; W.W. Eells of Newburyport, Massachusetts; W.P. Breed of Steubenville, Ohio; C.V. McKaig of Candor, Ebenezer Henry of Alleghany, and J.W. Scott of Washington, Pennsylvania. See: Ichabod S. Spencer, Duty of Obedience to Law (New York: M.W. Dodd, 1850). John M. Krebs, The American Citizen: A Discourse on the Nature and Extent of Our Religious Subjection to the Government Under Which We Live (New York: Charles Scribner, 1851). Charles Wadsworth, Politics in Religion (Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1854). John C. Lord, The Higher Law in Its Application to the Fugitive Slave Bill (Buffalo: H. Derby and Company, 1851). National Era, February 6, May 29, 1851. Liberator, November 8, December 27, 1850. Presbyterian Advocate, November 18, 1854. Cincinnati Enquirer, November 24, 1850. New York Herald, December 13, 1850. Daily Republican, October 25, 1851. Daily Union, December 11, 1850. New York Evening Express, November 26, 1850. Presbyterian Magazine, I (March, April, 1851), 93-94, 115-19, 199. Princeton Review, XXIII, No. 1 (January, 1851), 181-356. Southern Presbyterian Review, IV, No. 4 (January, 1851), 450; V, No. 1 (July, 1851), 173.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel I. Prime, Memoirs of the Rev. Nicholas Murray (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1862), 413.



law,<sup>31</sup> and the American Anti-Slavery Society recorded that perhaps one-hundred and fifty sermons were written in defense of Webster's position when he challenged the statement that there was a higher law than the Constitution. Edward Beecher enumerated eighteen clergymen in the East who also had taken the position of Webster.<sup>32</sup> In a sermon, December 12, 1850, Samuel Cox, of the First Church in Brooklyn, denounced those who encouraged resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law as "wicked and unchristian men." He advised submission to the law.<sup>33</sup> William Adams of the Fourth Presbytery of New York informed those who opposed the law:

Before you bring His name to sanction resistance to human laws, you must show us that it is His will that we should do so .... I can not take any man's word that there is a higher law than human government.

This sermon was repeated again in another church before the end of the month.<sup>34</sup> The Daily National Intelligencer, of Washington, gave extracts from a sermon by Adams which analyzed conscience as simply the mind of man which could be ignorant, imbecilic, or prejudiced. "Sincerity of

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<sup>31</sup>New York Daily Tribune, December 26, 1850.

<sup>32</sup>Charles K. Whipple, Relations of Anti-Slavery to Religion (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, n.d.), 6.

<sup>33</sup>New York Herald, December 13, 1850.

<sup>34</sup>New York Evening Express, November 11, 26, 1850.



judgment is no proof of its correctness."<sup>35</sup> In a sermon, December 12, 1850, Samuel Spear, of the South Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, advised in a sermon concerning the law:<sup>36</sup>

Cry out against it as long and as loud  
as you please; write against it; vote  
against it; but be sure to stop here;  
never lend your sanction to tumultuous  
or illegal resistance.

A.D. Smith, of Brainerd Church, Third Presbytery of New York, was less demanding for obedience in his Thanksgiving sermon: "The right we advocate," he said, "is simply that of declining obedience, and taking the consequences."<sup>37</sup> As the issues became clearer, he was finding it increasingly more difficult to agree with his conservative co-workers in the East.

The most popular sermon in defense of the Fugitive Slave Law was that of I.S. Spencer of the Old School Presbytery of New York. It was copied widely over the country and was commended by the journals that supported the law. When the New York Independent attacked Webster and the

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<sup>35</sup>Daily National Intelligencer, January 14, 1851.

<sup>36</sup>Ohio Observer, January 29, 1851. See Henry Wilson, History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America, (3 vols., Boston: James R. Osgood, 1878), II, 311. Wilson quotes Samuel T. Spear as saying, "I would sooner die than be its agent. The higher law of eternal right would be in my way, and by its decision I must abide."

<sup>37</sup>Ohio Observer, January 29, 1851.

Fugitive Slave Law, Spencer came to Webster's defense and pointedly rebuked the Independent in another sermon. Samuel Cox wrote to Spencer that his thanks and "those of the whole country are due to you for such a service." Cox had read the account in the Independent "with mute wonder and cold horror."<sup>38</sup> Cox and Gerard Hallock of the Journal of Commerce also addressed a letter to the New York Evening Express denouncing those who advised resistance to the law. In a letter to the Journal of Commerce, Cox also recommended that the law was "properly inviolable and paramount, or the shield of our safety is everywhere less than a sheaf of straw."<sup>39</sup> Albert Barnes, of Philadelphia, who was later to be so important in shaping opinion in the New School against slavery, spoke of "the duty of sustaining law" in his Thanksgiving sermon.<sup>40</sup> In 1853, Laurens Hickock, of Union College, Schenectady, New York, observed that the volcano could not be capped over with compromises. "These materials for an explosion would shake down far mightier

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<sup>38</sup>Liberator, February 21, 1851, citing the New York Observer.

<sup>39</sup>New York Evening Express, December 13, 16, 1850.

<sup>40</sup>Daily Republican, December 13, 1851.

mountain barriers than any political compromise," he said.<sup>41</sup>

Presbyterian layman Robert M. Riddle, editor of the Pittsburgh Commercial Journal, counselled obedience to the law. David H. Riddle, his brother, of the Third Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, preached, to the same effect, a sermon which was widely distributed in pamphlet form.<sup>42</sup> While viewing the sermons which had come to its attention, the Presbyterian Advocate commended "the healthful scriptural character which ... pervaded most of these discourses."<sup>43</sup>

Although it was difficult for opponents of the law to get into print, the western attitude was a contrast to that of the East. Horace Bushnell, of the Presbytery of Hamilton, opposed the enactment of the law of 1850. In May, 1851, he wrote a friend that it proposed things that he was not willing to do -- not even to save the Union. "I could cheerfully die to save it," he informed his friend, "but

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<sup>41</sup>Laurens Hickok, A Nation Saved From Its Prosperity Only by the Gospel: A Discourse in Behalf of the American Home Missionary Society, Preached in the Cities of New York and Brooklyn, May, 1853 (New York: Home Missionary Society, 1853), 15.

<sup>42</sup>Irene Williams, "The Operation of the Fugitive Slave Law in Western Pennsylvania From 1850-1860," Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine, IV, No. 1 (July, 1921), 153-54. George Swetnam, The Growing Edge of Conscience in The Presbyterian Valley, William McKinney (ed.), (Pittsburgh: David and Wade, Inc., 1958), 287.

<sup>43</sup>Presbyterian Advocate, January 15, 1851.



chase a fugitive or withhold my sympathy and aid from a fugitive from slavery! -- may God grant me grace never to do the damning sin of such obedience!" Bushnell was rapidly moving to the point at which he would withdraw his connection from the Presbyterian Church.<sup>44</sup> In July, 1851, he announced that he was leaving the Presbytery because of slavery, and asked for a letter of dismissal and recommendation to the Congregational Association of Cincinnati.<sup>45</sup> The Presbyterian clergy in Cleveland actively participated in the public meetings against the Fugitive Slave Law. Samuel C. Aiken spoke before a protest meeting on October 11, 1850,<sup>46</sup> and then at a later gathering. Aiken said the law should be treated "with the dignified contempt" of the Bostonians when they resolved to make a teapot of the Atlantic Ocean. At the same meeting, E.H. Nevin, who had recently left the Old School because of slavery convictions, and was soon to organize a Free Presbyterian Church, added: "There are no laws in Austria so bad as this. I

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<sup>44</sup>Mary Bushnell Cheney, Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880), 248.

<sup>45</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Hamilton, 1847-1868, 112-14.

<sup>46</sup>Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer, October 12, 1850. Cincinnati Enquirer, October 16, 1850.



would have my hand cut off rather than vote for a man who is in favor of this oppression."<sup>47</sup>

In Galesburg, Illinois, Flavel Bascom and Jonathan Blanchard spoke before a group protesting the passage of the act of 1850.<sup>48</sup> Both were soon to leave the Church because of its failure to break all connection with human bondage. On November 19, 1850, a letter from Blanchard appeared in the Chicago Western Citizen, covering seven columns, in which he explained why citizens ought to disobey the recently enacted law. George Duffield delivered a Thanksgiving Day sermon, in Detroit, which showed the difference between a simple individual refusal on grounds of conscience and "factious conspiracy and combination to resist the execution of Laws."<sup>49</sup> C.B. Barton, of the Presbytery of Springfield, delivered an uncompromising sermon, on the interests of the day, before his Farmington, Illinois, congregation, on November 10, 1850 in which he said:

It is idle to talk of compromise or silence on this subject. There can be no permanent peace until either slavery or freedom dies .... On the one side is the dollar and cent interest in human flesh and bones, on

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<sup>47</sup> Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer, October 28, 1850.

<sup>48</sup> Knoxville Journal, November 12, 1850.

<sup>49</sup> Lewis G. VanderVelde, (ed.), "The Diary of George Duffield," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIV, No. 1 (June, 1937), 31.

the other is the simple but mighty moral force of eternal truth, deep down in the hearts and consciences of the people, yea of the whole people, that slavery is wrong .... The passage of this bill has aroused the most stupid to thought and action, and caused to vibrate with unwonted tones, every chord in the heart of freedom. Its requirements are so atrocious, that it is the right and duty of every man who values liberty of conscience and personal freedom, to meet it with uncompromising opposition.<sup>50</sup>

In the West only R.W. Patterson, of Chicago, a New School clergyman, spoke in defense of the new enactment. He preached that the doctrine that God, rather than man, should be obeyed was not identical with the doctrine that all laws which conflict with the Divine Law are to be disregarded.<sup>51</sup> When the question of the Kansas-Nebraska Act was thrust before the public, the Fugitive Slave Law again became a topic for sermons in the West.<sup>52</sup>

As the Assembly of 1851 began to draw near there was a renewal of interest in the subject of the recent civil enactments in the Presbyterian journals. The Princeton

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<sup>50</sup>Presbytery Reporter, II, No. 22 (January, 1851), 387-88.

<sup>51</sup>Chicago Daily Democrat, December 18, 1850.

<sup>52</sup>George C. Curtis, Prospects Before the Country: A Discourse Delivered in Adrian, Michigan, June 25, 1854 (Adrian, Michigan: Jermain Brothers, 1854), 12. P.S. Cleland, The Higher Law, A Sermon Delivered in Greenwood, Indiana, On Thanksgiving Day, November 20, 1856 (Indianapolis: Cameron and M'Neely Book and Job Printers, 1856), 5, 8.

Review, in a well-reasoned article, reviewed a devastating pamphlet by Moses Stuart, a New England Congregationalist. The Review concluded that the duty of the citizen was "not obedience, but submission."<sup>53</sup> The New York Observer reprinted part of the article with apparent approval.<sup>54</sup> The Observer had already considered the Stuart pamphlet and found it an unanswerable defense of the act of 1850.<sup>55</sup> "In case of conflict" one was "solemnly bound to yield to the supreme authority," answered the New York Evangelist. The next week the editor added that the individual was "morally bound to apply the Higher Law to the regulation of his conduct, and never more so than when it is contravened by the authority of man."<sup>56</sup>

When the general conference of the "Constitutional" Church met in Utica in 1851, the question of the new enactment occupied a prominent position in the debate. A letter on this subject was sent from the Palmyra Church,<sup>57</sup> in the Presbytery of Geneva, asking that this subject be considered, and the Presbytery of Belvidere also brought the subject

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<sup>53</sup> Princeton Review, XXIII, No. 1 (January, 1851), 151.

<sup>54</sup> New York Observer, February 6, 1851.

<sup>55</sup> New York Observer, March 15, 1851.

<sup>56</sup> New York Evangelist, March 27, April 3, 1851.

<sup>57</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1851, 13.



before the body.<sup>58</sup> The new law was given as a reason why the Assembly should adopt new policies. A delegate from the Presbytery of Grand River informed the gathering that 10,000 fugitives had been aided while passing through his region. He asked for a statement from the Church.<sup>59</sup> The Assembly voted down an attempt to amend the resolutions passed with provisions that encouraged political action against the Fugitive Slave Law, and aid for the fleeing fugitives.<sup>60</sup> In a discussion of the Utica meeting the Central Christian Herald, of Cincinnati, characterized the sentiment of the Church as being decidedly against the political compromise of 1850. "Not one word was said in favor" of the law to return fugitives, reported the editor, but "many were spoken against it."<sup>61</sup>

When the lower judicatories met in the autumn of 1851, the Presbytery of Alton adopted measures condemning the civil enactment of 1850 as "contrary to the dictates of humanity, ... the principles of justice, and ... the law of God." A determination was expressed "to use all lawful and

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<sup>58</sup> Records of the Presbytery of Belvidere, 1847-1863, 31.

<sup>59</sup> New York Observer, May 22, 1851.

<sup>60</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1851, 13, 18-19. Presbytery Reporter, II (July, 1851), 37-38.

<sup>61</sup> Central Christian Herald, June 5, 1851.



only lawful means to procure its repeal."<sup>62</sup> The Synod of Illinois bore testimony against the "inhumanity and injustice" of the law.<sup>63</sup> Other western judicatories came forward and took a "higher law" stand.<sup>64</sup> Only the Synod of Michigan failed to take action after considering the question of higher law and civil obedience.<sup>65</sup> In up-state New York the Presbyteries of North River and Cortland denounced the Fugitive Slave Law in terms somewhat milder than was characteristic of their sister New School judicatories in the Middle West.<sup>66</sup>

The Old School Church showed a marked contrast in its policy of refusing to take a position on civil matters. R.J. Breckinridge, who was very much disturbed by the conflict likely to grow out of the Compromise of 1850, asked the Assembly of May, 1850, to draw up a memorial

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<sup>62</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Alton, 1850-1863, II, 39.

<sup>63</sup>Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855, I, 388.

<sup>64</sup>Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1849-1869, II, 56. Records of the Synod of Wabash, 1851-1869, 38. Records of the Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 237. Presbytery of Franklin: Crist, op. cit., 45.

<sup>65</sup>Records of the Synod of Michigan, 1842-1853, II, 12.

<sup>66</sup>Daily Republican, March 8, 1851. New York Observer, October 2, 1851.

to Congress, which could be signed by the members, "on the subject of the preservation and perpetuation of the National Union and the Federal Constitution." The resolution was postponed indefinitely.<sup>67</sup> A church in the Presbytery of Beaver petitioned the Synod of Pittsburgh to express an opinion on the Fugitive Slave Law which the church denounced as iniquitous. The Synod declared that any expression at this time was inexpedient.<sup>68</sup> The Old School Presbytery of Chillicothe voted to "obey God rather than man," but would "submit quietly to the penalty of the law."<sup>69</sup> As early as 1840 the Presbytery of Clarion, Ohio, of the Associate Reformed Synod, had declared that it would not obey the old law. Clarion had taken steps to aid members fined under the law.<sup>70</sup> The First Associate Reformed Synod of the West asked its members to petition Congress for the repeal of the Act of 1850, and warned them against accepting any office in which they would be called upon to enforce the law, while the Second Synod regretted the passage of the

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<sup>67</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1850 (Old School), 448-49.

<sup>68</sup>New York Herald, October 18, 1850. Presbyterian Advocate, October 30, 1850.

<sup>69</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Chillicothe, 1846-1860, IV, 130-132.

<sup>70</sup>Philanthropist, November 4, 1840; June 5, 1841.

measure, and warned against holding an office that would entail responsibility of enforcement.<sup>71</sup> When the Second Synod was asked to make it a rule that supporters of this act should not receive the vote of the Synod members, it resolved that "members should vote consistent with their profession," but would not go so far as "to attempt to control men in this matter."<sup>72</sup> Before the passage of the Compromise of 1850, both the Associate Synod of North America and the Free Presbyterian Church had passed resolutions to refrain from voting for supporters of slavery and both declared the law of 1850 null and void.<sup>73</sup> While both the Associate and Associate Reformed Churches in the West took a stronger position than the "Constitutional" Church, the branches of both of these bodies in the East did not follow the lead of Western churches.

As time softened resistance, two years after the passage of the Compromise of 1850, the New York Evangelist protested against "the insanity of saying that a statute

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<sup>71</sup>United Presbyterian, IV, No. 8 (December, 1850), 375, 416-17.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., VI, No. 7 (November, 1852), 314-15.

<sup>73</sup>Evangelical Repository, VII, No. 2 (July, 1848), 211-13, 218; VIII, No. 5 (October, 1849), 249-50; X, No. 1 (July, 1851), 87. See Records of the Free Presbytery of Mahoning, 1847-1855, 24. Daily Ohio State Journal, December 18, 1850.

duly enacted by competent legal authority is no statute unless it be morally perfect,"<sup>74</sup> but as to the long term consequences of the act, it is difficult not to agree with the Presbyterian of the West, which noted, in 1853, that the measure promised "to become a most powerful propagator of anti-Slaveryism."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>New York Evangelist, September 30, 1852.

<sup>75</sup>Presbyterian of the West, October 27, 1853.



## CHAPTER IV

### POLITICAL CONTROVERSY AND DIVISION

By 1851 the "Constitutional" Church had moved along far enough that the Prairie Herald asked for moderation, saying, the first two commandments of Jesus: "to love the Lord ... and thy neighbor" should be applied as fast as possible, and slavery would not only go out of the Church but out of the world. The editor concurred with Horace Bushnell in asking only "that a door be left opened for slavery to go out of the Church."<sup>1</sup> When the annual meeting of the general church body convened,<sup>2</sup> memorials were presented by the Presbyteries of Chicago, Grand River, and Belvidere asking for progress in accord with the measures adopted at Detroit in 1850.<sup>3</sup> The commissioners of the Presbyteries of Fort Wayne and Salem were similarly instructed, but the Assembly made no advancement beyond the position of 1850.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Prairie Herald, April 22, 1851.

<sup>2</sup>After 1849 annual meetings were held and the review power of the Assembly was restored.

<sup>3</sup>Prairie Herald, May 6, 27, 1851. Records of the Presbytery of Grand River, 1849-1867, III, 55. Records of the Presbytery of Belvidere, 1847-1863, 31.

<sup>4</sup>Central Christian Herald, September 26, 1850. Records of the Presbytery of Salem, 1840-1861, II, 266.

The Synods of Indiana and Western Reserve were satisfied to allow a period of rest, but the Presbyteries of Fort Wayne, Franklin, and Athens asked for action and judicial charges against Southern churches on the ground of "common fame," but the Assembly of 1852 indefinitely postponed consideration of the charges.<sup>5</sup>

The question of separation from the New School Church was being thoroughly discussed in the West by 1851. Samuel Aiken preached two sermons in opposition to the secession of Western Reserve.<sup>6</sup> When Barnes' book on slavery appeared, Alfred Nevin and other Free Presbyterian advocates interpreted statements in the book as justifying separation. A debate was waged for twenty days in the Daily True Democrat between Nevin and Aiken.<sup>7</sup> Aiken had a letter from Barnes printed in the Daily True Democrat which denied that Barnes had advocated secession. The Free Presbyterian Church was not giving a more honest testimony than it would be giving if it were a part of the "Constitutional" Church.

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<sup>5</sup>Records of the following: Synod of Indiana, 1846-1857, II, 121; Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 106; Presbytery of Franklin, 1846-1860, I, 163-64. Assembly Minutes, 1852, 160-62, 178. New York Observer, June 3, 1852. Central Christian Herald, May 6, 1852.

<sup>6</sup>Ohio Observer, December 25, 31, 1851.

<sup>7</sup>Daily True Democrat, January 12, 14, 15, 20, 23, 31, 1852.

The Presbyterian Church would continue in its progress until clear of the institution of human bondage, Barnes wrote in the letter. This letter was reprinted widely as a means of staving off secession tendencies.<sup>8</sup> Barnes gave the opening sermon in the Assembly of 1852 and used the occasion to strengthen the Church's position against secession. He sounded the keynote of progress. "We cannot recede .... The Age will not suffer us to recede," he said. The Church would move on until it was clear of slavery.<sup>9</sup> Separation continued to be the chief topic in Western Reserve for the remainder of 1852. The moderators of both the Synod of Western Reserve and the Presbytery of Trumbull spoke against secession in 1852.<sup>10</sup> The Presbytery of Grand River rejected an overture for separation in 1851, but asked the churches to vote on it in 1853, only to withdraw consideration after the Church action of that year. Grand River asked the Synod to adopt measures to quiet the churches, and Portage, although opposing separation, expressed a willingness to

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<sup>8</sup>Presbytery Reporter, II, No. 6 (March 1, 1852), 131-3. Central Christian Herald, January 29, 1852.

<sup>9</sup>Albert Barnes, Our Position: A Sermon Preached Before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, May 20, 1852 (New York: Newman and Ivison, 1852), 37. Presbyterian Quarterly Review, I, No. 1 (September, 1852), 290.

<sup>10</sup>Ohio Observer, September 22, 1852.



follow the Synod. But the Synod of Western Reserve optimistically saw progress that dictated against division.<sup>11</sup>

In 1852 Robert Bishop, who had changed over to the "Constitutional" Church, opened correspondence for the purpose of having presbyteries, both North and South, furnish statistics concerning the status of the colored population. This was rejected by his Southern correspondent as impractical,<sup>12</sup> but Bishop had already proceeded to promote a plan to ask for Southern statistics, through a series of letters in the Central Christian Herald. In the second letter he included resolutions that he intended to offer before the Presbytery of Hamilton, petitioning this body to ask the Assembly to call on the South to furnish statistics. He suggested that other judicatories take similar steps.<sup>13</sup> Although Bishop was ill and did not attend the next two sessions of the Presbytery, the record showed the resolutions were presented and rejected on the ground

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<sup>11</sup>Records of the following: Presbytery of Grand River, 1849-1867, III, 50, 81, 91, 103; Presbytery of Portage, 1843-1863, IV, 206-07; Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 126.

<sup>12</sup>Robert Bishop Papers and Miscellaneous Notes, (Manuscript: Miami University Library, Oxford, Ohio), W.L. McLain to Bishop, April 9, 1852.

<sup>13</sup>Central Christian Herald, December 18, 1851. Bishop Papers, Resolutions to Be Presented to the Presbytery, 1852.



that the Church had turned down a similar request in 1851.<sup>14</sup>

When the New School Assembly convened at Buffalo, in 1853, eleven memorials were presented asking for progress that would apply the Detroit measures of 1850. The Synod of Ohio asked the Church to call for statistics from the Southern presbyteries.<sup>15</sup> The committee on slavery presented a report asking for information on the status of Negroes in the South. The report proposed that "competent men in the several southern synods" be appointed to furnish statistics and answer queries "with regard to the extension of slavery in the churches."<sup>16</sup> The report was indefinitely postponed after a day of debate. A modified report was presented and accepted. Since a Southern judicatory had complained of "unkindness and injustice on the part of Northern brethren," the report requested the Southern presbyteries to supply information to the next meeting of the

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<sup>14</sup>Central Christian Herald, April 22, 1852. Records of the Presbytery of Hamilton, 1847-1868, 114, 122-23, Prairie Herald, May 27, 1851.

<sup>15</sup>Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1849-1862, II, 90. See Assembly Minutes, 1853, 333. Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1846-1857, II, 132. Records of the Presbytery of Salem, 1841-1861, II, 300, 315. Presbytery of Indianapolis: Central Christian Herald, March 31, 1853.

<sup>16</sup>John Monteith Papers, (5 vols., Manuscript: Michigan Historical Collection of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan), III, John Monteith to John Monteith, Jr., May 25, 1853.

Church as a means of correcting "misapprehensions which may exist in many Northern minds." The report was adopted, but protests were made declaring the action unconstitutional and complaining that it had passed with less than a majority of the full house, since many had departed following the indefinite postponement. The protests were signed by thirty-six delegates, of which eighteen were from the East and five from the Middle West.<sup>17</sup> The answer of the Church to the Protest disclaimed any motive other than "the development of facts calculated to correct misapprehensions,"<sup>18</sup> but one of the members of the slavery committee, John Monteith, privately wrote his son:<sup>19</sup>

The report ... is not a compromise ....  
It proposes to advance slowly, not now to  
commence discipline, but to make our-  
selves acquainted with the facts ....  
This is the step by which we are to  
prepare for future action.

Another matter that caused controversy in the New School Church in 1853 was a motion to have the Assembly commend general circulation of G.N. Judd's book, The History of the Division of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. A proposal was made to have the chapter

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<sup>17</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1853, 327-331-34.

<sup>18</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1853, 334-39.

<sup>19</sup> John Monteith Papers, John Monteith to his son, III, May 25, 1853.

on slavery omitted. The author viewed the Presbyterian Church as "conservative" on the question of human bondage, but saw the goal of the Church as an "everlasting divorce ... from all connection with the institution."<sup>20</sup> When it was moved that the book be accepted as it was written by the author, a delegate from Mississippi objected chiefly because the treatise claimed the Church was in advance of the Old School on the subject of slavery. He stated that the Southern Church had been "obliged to suppress" fifty copies that had been sent to Jackson, Mississippi. W.A. Niles, of Wisconsin, informed the body that "the circulation of an expurged edition" in Wisconsin would "destroy the Presbyterian Church" there: "An expurged edition will be death." A compromise was finally adopted that commended "the book to the careful examination of the church."<sup>21</sup>

The acts of the "Constitutional" Church in 1853 received almost unanimous approval by the judicatories

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<sup>20</sup>G. N. Judd, The History of the Division of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1852), 218.

<sup>21</sup>New York Observer, June 2, 1853.



in the Middle West.<sup>22</sup> The Presbytery of Salem also resolved that the Church ought, from this point, to "advance kindly, firmly, and without unnecessary delay" until this sin of human bondage was removed from its portals.<sup>23</sup> Only the Presbytery of Dayton, in the Middle West, asked the parent body "to avoid all renting of the church by violent agitation on this vexed question." Dayton, however, approved the acts of 1853 at Buffalo.<sup>24</sup> Measures were presented to the Presbytery of Schuyler expressing a willingness "for the present that no further action be taken," but these resolutions were laid on the table.<sup>25</sup> In the East the

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<sup>22</sup>See Records of the following: Synod of Indiana, 1846-1857, II, 149; Presbytery of Madison, 1838-1857, 310; Presbytery of Greencastle, 1851-1860, I, 333; Presbytery of Crawfordsville, 1835-1868, 441; Presbytery of Indianapolis, 1839-1863, 263; Presbytery of Franklin, 1846-1860, 207. Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, 284; Synod of Michigan, 1842-1853, II, 292; Presbytery of Marshall, 1845-1861, II, 229; Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 137; Presbytery of Cleveland, 1847-1870, 94; Synod of Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 157; Presbytery of Chicago, 1847-1870, 135; Presbytery of Belvidere, 1847-1863, 53; Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 203. Presbytery of Elkhart: New York Evangelist, April 27, 1854. Synod of Ohio: Ohio Observer, November 16, 1853.

<sup>23</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Salem, 1840-1861, II, 327.

<sup>24</sup>Central Christian Herald, April 13, 1854.

<sup>25</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Schuyler, 1840-1856, 265.



Presbytery of Montrose unanimously resolved: "Further agitation in the General Assembly ... is inexpedient."<sup>26</sup> The Synod of New York-New Jersey charged the highest judicatory with transcending its legitimate powers by making an investigation that involved original jurisdiction. The Synod asked that the problem of dealing with property in man be left to the lower courts of the Church.<sup>27</sup> The New York Observer had expected this Synod to take "decided and manly" action, and to "put forth principles that would compel conviction, command respect, and exert influence." The editor was unhappy that the Synod of New York-New Jersey had included the following qualification in its resolutions: "Without any reference to the action of previous General Assemblies, we believe that in the present aspect of divine Providence, the agitation ... is undesirable and inexpedient." The Observer now saw two parties in the Church: "one party intent on driving the wedge, the other party regretting such action, yet fearing to correct it."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> New York Observer, September 22, 1853. For similar action of the Fourth Presbytery of Philadelphia see: Ohio Observer, November 16, 1853. The Presbytery of Otsego approved the Assembly action: New York Observer, June 23, 1835.

<sup>27</sup> Liberator, November 4, 1853. Ohio Observer, November 16, 1853.

<sup>28</sup> New York Observer, January 5, 1854.

On July 4, 1853, a convention of Southern New School Presbyterians met at Murfreesboro, Tennessee, to consider the Buffalo measures. Resolutions were adopted which declared the Detroit measures of 1850 and the Acts of 1853 unconstitutional. This meeting passed resolutions counseling the Southern Churches to "present themselves in full force and unanimity, and demand of the General Assembly a definite settlement." It was claimed that the Church had adopted new tests not required by the Scriptures. The convention advised the Southern Church to reject the request for information, and called on the conservatives in the North and West to unite with the South in the next Assembly to "aid in preserving the integrity of the Church."<sup>29</sup> A group of Virginia and Delaware Presbyterians addressed a circular letter to the Murfreesboro Convention which was not received before adjournment. The letter was printed in the Christian Observer so that it would have the effect of promoting unity of action in the South on the steps that should be taken to meet the crisis. The signers of the letter committed themselves to withdraw, and "form a distinct organization," if agitation were permitted in the Church after a formal protest had been lodged in the Assembly against it. The letter advised the presbyteries to

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<sup>29</sup>New York Observer, July 28, 1853. Christian Observer, July 5, 1853.

pledge themselves to "decline sending any response to the inquiries proposed" in 1853.<sup>30</sup> The Presbytery of Galena considered the resolutions of the Murfreesboro Convention and the circular letter, and decided that the denial of freedom of debate in the Assembly would be "unreasonable and impolite." The right of debate was "an inalienable and constitutional right which can never be surrendered." The request by the Church for information was considered "strictly constitutional, and in its nature reasonable."<sup>31</sup> The Central Christian Herald noticed that the Buffalo Measures had caused "excitement in the Eastern and Southern sections of the Church." The editor added, "Some severe animadversions have been made upon the West, but we care not to repeat or repel them."<sup>32</sup> The Presbyterian of the West supported the "Constitutional" Church in its request for information on the Southern institution.<sup>33</sup>

In September, 1853, the Presbytery of Winchester sent a circular letter to all Northern New School

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<sup>30</sup>New York Observer, September 1, 1853. Christian Observer, July 16, 1853.

<sup>31</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Galena, 1841-1863, 186, 191.

<sup>32</sup>Central Christian Herald, July 28, 1853.

<sup>33</sup>Presbyterian of the West, December 29, 1853.



presbyteries. "The South must have some reasonable assurance that this crusade against her ... in the Assembly will cease," warned Winchester, "or her connection with that body must necessarily come to an end." The letter asked "no retraction" of what had been said, but simply "an expression of the impropriety and undesirableness of any further action by the Assembly on the subject of slavery."<sup>34</sup> In answer to the letter the Third Presbytery of New York referred Winchester to the measures of the Synod of New York-New Jersey in which a position of silence had already been taken for the present. Asa D. Smith objected to any agreement to check progress.<sup>35</sup> The New York Evangelist revealed that it had received many replies to the Winchester letter, most of which were from the West.<sup>36</sup> The Presbytery of Elyria refused to give a pledge of silence but continued by giving Winchester a lecture on slavery,<sup>37</sup> and the Trumbull

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<sup>34</sup>Presbytery Reporter, IV, No. 4 (November 1, 1853), 99-100.

<sup>35</sup>Liberator, May 19, 1854. S.D. Alexander, The Presbytery of New York, 1738 to 1888 (New York: D.F. Randolph and Company, n.d.), 119.

<sup>36</sup>New York Evangelist, May 18, 1854.

<sup>37</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 212-215.



Presbytery followed its refusal with an account of how the problems growing out of human bondage were wrecking and dividing the churches under its care.<sup>38</sup> "In view of recent developments in Congress," the Presbytery of Huron could not agree with the request.<sup>39</sup> Not a single judicatory from the West agreed to refrain from discussing the problem of the relation of the Church to human bondage.<sup>40</sup>

When the Nebraska Bill was introduced in Congress, it met surprising resistance in religious circles, particularly in the East. Since "the Gospel is Love, Slavery is embodied hate" and the "question of its extension ... is one that eminently concerns the Christian," said the Free

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<sup>38</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Trumbull, 1847-1861, II, 179-83.

<sup>39</sup>R. Braden Moore, History of Huron Presbytery (Philadelphia: William F. Fell, 1892), 186.

<sup>40</sup>See Records of the following: Presbytery of Galena, 1841-1863, 204; Presbytery of Schuyler, 1840-1856, 269-70; Presbytery of Fox River, 1851-1870, 14; Presbytery of Meadville, 1843-1855, 218-20; Presbytery of Grand River, 1849-1867, III, 112-14; Presbytery of Belvidere, 1847-1863, 51-53; Presbytery of Indianapolis, 1839-1863, I, 274; Presbytery of Madison, 1838-1857, I, 324; Presbytery of Crawfordville, 1835-1868, 450. Synod of Iowa: Presbytery Reporter, IV, No. 4 (November, 1853), 88. Synod of Peoria: Ohio Observer, November 16, 1853. Presbytery of Ottawa: Gould, op. cit., 175. Presbytery of North River: New York Evangelist, May 4, 1854. Presbyteries of Athens, Hamilton, and Cincinnati: Central Christian Herald, April 27, May 11, 1854.

Presbyterian, of Albany, New York.<sup>41</sup> If the Missouri Compromise can be nullified, "may not the Compromise of 1850 in its turn become nugatory?" questioned the New York Evangelist.<sup>42</sup> The Central Christian Herald opposed the bill, and the Ohio Observer advised that firm opposition would kill the proposal.<sup>43</sup> The Presbyterian of the West warned: "Set aside and trample on the Compromise of 1820, and that of 1850 will not be worth a straw."<sup>44</sup> Even the New York Observer opposed the Nebraska Bill because it "proposed annulling ... a solemn compact which has heretofore been regarded as beyond repeal."<sup>45</sup> The Presbyterian of the West returned to the subject: "Shall a minority, ... with desperate determination, override the solemn compact of the nation for the purpose of giving despotism a wider kingdom? Never!"<sup>46</sup>

The New York Daily Times found "all the most

<sup>41</sup>Cited by National Era, March 2, 1854.

<sup>42</sup>New York Evangelist, January 12, 1854.

<sup>43</sup>Central Christian Herald, April 13, 1854. Ohio Observer, February 15, 1854.

<sup>44</sup>Presbyterian of the West, March 2, 1854.

<sup>45</sup>Cited by Chicago Tribune, February 13, 1854.

<sup>46</sup>Presbyterian of the West, March 23, 1854.

influential clergymen" in New York City opposing the Nebraska Bill, and the New York Evangelist was pleased that the clergy had shown "no favor to this traitorous aggression on the rights of humanity."<sup>47</sup> The Journal of Commerce was said to have reported that 3,263 anti-Nebraska sermons had been preached in New England and New York during six weeks in the early part of 1854.<sup>48</sup> A Chicago clergyman, traveling in the East, wrote the Chicago Daily Tribune, March 30, 1854, that he had witnessed a meeting organized to resist the Fugitive Law in Syracuse in which the clergy took a prominent part. "The deep indignation of the religious community" was "everywhere directed against Douglas and slavery." But Samuel Cox, of Brooklyn, continued the position he had taken in 1850. In a sermon before the Southern Aid Society he said, "As Nebraska is not the Gospel, not justification by faith, not authorized in our commission ... let us Preach the Gospel, and let politics, on both sides of the Mississippi alone."<sup>49</sup> Outside of the eastern seaboard the Nebraska Bill found no defenders among the Presbyterian clergy. Joseph Bittinger, of the Presbytery

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<sup>47</sup>New York Daily Times, March 11, 1854. Evangelist, cited by the Liberator, March 24, 1854.

<sup>48</sup>Cited by Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, April 6, 1854.

<sup>49</sup>First Report of the Southern Aid Society, 1854,  
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of Cleveland, took his stand as an absolute moralist.

"Right and wrong admit no compromise. Every compromise in the domain of ethics is treason or dereliction," he warned.<sup>50</sup> Flavel Bascom blamed the northern ministry and churches for creating a climate for the current political movements. If slavery had been treated "as a stupendous crime, northern politicians would never have had presumption to propose a scheme so black as the Nebraska bill."<sup>51</sup> Alvah Day, of the Presbytery of Ottawa, found the new political measures "pretty universally condemned" in the churches of northern Illinois. He promised that a voice would come from the people of the Northwest during the next election that would be "heard in High places."<sup>52</sup> Thomas Skinner, of the Fourth Presbytery of New York, presided over a meeting opposing the Fugitive Law and the Nebraska Bill at Lockport, New York, and William Fuller, of the Presbytery of St. Joseph, Michigan, introduced anti-Nebraska resolutions at a similar meeting in Michigan.<sup>53</sup>

In New England, clergymen petitioned Congress

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<sup>50</sup>Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer, May 10, 1854.

<sup>51</sup>AHMS Correspondence; Bascom to Badger, March 9, 1854.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.; Day to Executive Committee, Kendall County, Illinois, July 3, 1854, October 1, 1854.

<sup>53</sup>New York Tribune, February 28, 1854. Detroit Daily Democrat, February 22, 1854.



opposing the Nebraska Bill, and a petition followed from New York signed by one-hundred and fifty-one clergymen.<sup>54</sup> Forty-one of the petitioners were from the New School and seven were from the Old School Presbyterians.<sup>55</sup> Forty-five clergymen of Rochester, New York, signed another memorial to Congress,<sup>56</sup> and fifty-seven from Pittsburgh followed suit. The Liberator said that the Pittsburgh clergy were as "staid and conservative a band of hunkers as could be found," and expressed surprise that they would draw up a petition.<sup>57</sup> In Chicago twenty-five men of the cloth petitioned Douglas and enlarged the memorial to include five-hundred and four ministers before it was sent to Washington. The day after the meeting to organize the petition, Douglas was burned in effigy in Chicago.<sup>58</sup> Of the original signers three were New and one was an Old School Presbyterian. H.H. Richardson, a member of the "Reformed" Assembly, was

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<sup>54</sup>New York Tribune, March 16, 1854.

<sup>55</sup>New York contained 49 New School and 42 Old School clergymen. Thirteen of the New School petitioners were located outside of New York.

<sup>56</sup>Springfield Daily Republican, March 28, 1854.

<sup>57</sup>Liberator, April 14, 1854.

<sup>58</sup>Daily Chicago Tribune, March 28, 29, 31, 1854.  
Daily Democratic Press, March 29, May 12, 1854.

chairman of the resolutions committee. He delivered a sermon earlier in the same month in which he had characterized the Nebraska Bill as "a wicked, ungodly, and pernicious measure." The sermon had been printed for circulation.<sup>59</sup> When the Presbytery of Ottawa met, it appended its entire roll to the Chicago petition.<sup>60</sup> Douglas answered the Chicago petition and this climaxed a stormy counter-attack in the secular press.<sup>61</sup> The Daily Union censured political activity by clergy and the Journal of Commerce called the New York project "a dangerous influence .... This effort to turn the pulpit and the clergy into engines for ... political purposes will damage the cause it is designed to promote."<sup>62</sup> The New York Evangelist interpreted this editorial as another attempt by the Journal "to overawe this class of citizens and to disfranchise them."<sup>63</sup> Other secular papers

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<sup>59</sup>Daily Democratic Press, April 1, 1854.

<sup>60</sup>Gould, op. cit., 175-76.

<sup>61</sup>Daily Democratic Press, April 18, 1854. Daily Democrat, April 19, 1854.

<sup>62</sup>Daily Union, March 11, 15, 1854.

<sup>63</sup>Cited by Liberator, March 24, 1854.

took up the attack.<sup>64</sup> The New York petition was presented to the clergy of Western Reserve through the columns of the Ohio Observer of March 15, 1854, and the Presbyteries of Portage, Pataskala, Trumbull and Alton petitioned their Senators and Representatives in Congress and asked that they oppose the Nebraska Bill.<sup>65</sup> The Presbytery of Franklin denounced the Nebraska Bill, and the Crawfordsville Presbytery called it "an awful and wicked endeavor" and "a violation of the pledged faith" of the government. Crawfordsville petitioned the Assembly "to express its disapprobation."<sup>66</sup>

When the "Constitutional" Assembly met in 1854, a remonstrance against the Nebraska Bill was submitted from the floor but voted down. The New York Tribune's correspondent, however, found this to be no test of sentiment concerning the bill. Feeling was said to be strongly against the

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<sup>64</sup>Daily Evening Star, April 6, 1854. Cleveland Daily Plain Dealer, March 27, 1854.

<sup>65</sup>Records of the following: Presbytery of Portage, 1843-1863, IV, 228; Presbytery of Pataskala, 1848-1870, II, 120; Presbytery of Alton, 1850-1863, II, 109. Presbytery of Trumbull: Ohio Observer, May 3, 1854.

<sup>66</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Franklin, 1846-1860, 215. Records of the Presbytery of Crawfordsville, 1835-1868, 451. For opinions in the Presbytery of Portage, see New York Observer, April 19, 1854.



Nebraska measure.<sup>67</sup> Twenty-nine delegates protested against the failure of the Church to demand that the South answer the inquiries of 1853. Twenty-one of the signers were from the Middle West, four of the remaining eight were from the Presbytery of Cayuga, New York, and the other four were from western New York.<sup>68</sup>

When the lower judicatories met in the autumn of 1854 and the spring of 1855, there was general protest against the failure of the parent body to require the Southern churches to report the facts asked for in 1853, to state explicitly it would not recede from the position then occupied, and to adopt resolutions opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Act.<sup>69</sup> The Presbytery of Cleveland, however, was not disappointed with the failure of the Assembly to

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<sup>67</sup> New York Observer, June 2, 1854. New York Tribune, May 30, 1854.

<sup>68</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1854, 498-99, 504-505.

<sup>69</sup> See Records of the following: Synod of Illinois, 1831-1855, 435-36; Synod of Ohio, 1849-1869, II, 146; Presbytery of Franklin, 1846-1860, 224; Presbytery of Indianapolis, 1839-1863, 283; Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 162; Synod of Wabash, 1851-1869, 50; Presbytery of Greencastle, 1851-1860, I, 113; Presbytery of Alton, 1850-1863, II, 122; Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 233; Presbytery of Cincinnati, 1844-1870, II, 281-82. Synods of Utica and Geneva: New York Evangelist, September 7, 1854. Presbytery of Ottawa: Gould, op. cit., 155, 175, 179-80. George Allison, Forest, Fort and Faith: Historical Sketches of the Presbytery of Fort Wayne (Fort Wayne: Presbytery of Fort Wayne, 1945), 45.



consider the Nebraska question, as this was considered outside the scope of the Church's constitution.<sup>70</sup> In June, 1854, the Presbytery of Champlain, New York, adopted measures protesting against the failure of the Church to act in such a way that it afforded "hope of a speedy deliverance" from all connection with the Southern institution. A committee of correspondence was selected to determine the views of other judicatories, and adopt some definite plan of operation so that the next meeting of the general Church body would offer hope of harmony and success.<sup>71</sup> The committee sent out a circular letter to all northern presbyteries which called for co-operation in order to deny fellowship and church membership to slaveholders "through a solemn vote of the General Assembly," as soon as it could be regularly obtained.<sup>72</sup> The letter was sent out in the name of the judicatory without previous approval.<sup>73</sup> The New York Evangelist felt that Champlain was acting hastily as there were "difficulties in the case ...

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<sup>70</sup>New York Evangelist, October 26, 1854.

<sup>71</sup>The Christian and Apostolic Abolition of Slavery, Stated and Recommended in a Report Read Before Champlain Presbytery (Rouse's Point, New York: D. Turner, 1855), 5. Hereafter: Christian and Apostolic Abolition.

<sup>72</sup>New York Evangelist, September 28, 1854.

<sup>73</sup>Christian and Apostolic Abolition, 6.

neither stated nor met." But the chairman of the committee clarified the position of the letter as not proposing immediate separation.<sup>74</sup> The Third Presbytery of New York and that of Brooklyn reminded Champlain that the church session was the proper court to commence a process against members who had sinned.<sup>75</sup> Many of the judicatories in the Middle West agreed with the end but not with the method.<sup>76</sup> The Presbyteries of Indianapolis and Pennsylvania (located in western New York) agreed by suggesting that Southern church bodies be arraigned before the Assembly, or that the Constitution be changed to make slaveholding an offense.<sup>77</sup>

After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, a degree of optimism began to develop about the possibility of keeping slavery out of Kansas. The Emigrant Aid Society was being organized and the New York Evangelist predicted that "a cordon sanitaire of free settlers" would bound the

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<sup>74</sup> New York Evangelist, October 5, 19, 1854.

<sup>75</sup> New York Evangelist, October 12, 19, 1854.

<sup>76</sup> Records of the Presbyteries of: Crawfordsville, 1835-1868, 459-61; Cleveland, 1847-1870, 110-17.

<sup>77</sup> Records of the Presbytery of Indianapolis, 1839-1863, I, 284-85. Presbytery of Pennsylvania: New York Evangelist, October 19, 1854.

southern frontier of Kansas and act as "an eternal barrier to the inroads of slavery."<sup>78</sup> A letter from a Presbyterian clergyman appeared in the Presbyterian. It pointed out that Kansas was a grazing country and not likely to have many slaves. "The probability, ... amounts to almost a certainty, that Kansas will come into the Union as a free State," said the writer.<sup>79</sup> To the increasing threats that the North would not permit the Fugitive Slave Law to be enforced because of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the New York Observer replied: "Two wrongs will not make one right. The Nebraska bill is wrong, but resistance to the fugitive slave law is not right .... We shall stand by the laws of the United States, and at all hazards insist as every good citizen should insist upon their prompt and literal execution."<sup>80</sup>

When William H. Seward suggested in a speech before a Republican meeting in Buffalo, in October, 1855, that the menaces of disunion should be braved in opposing the extension of slavery, Robert Breckinridge appealed to him for moderation.<sup>81</sup> As a constituent and kinsman, Breckinridge

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<sup>78</sup> Cited by Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, June 25, 1854.

<sup>79</sup> Cited by Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, June 3, 1854.

<sup>80</sup> New York Observer, June 8, 1854.

<sup>81</sup> Liberator, November 30, 1855.

had urged in vain on a distinguished member of Congress the necessity of opposing the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. But "it is as nothing in comparison with the principles you avow and the ends you propose," wrote Breckinridge.<sup>82</sup>

In the Old School Church only the Presbyteries of Chillicothe, Ohio, and Dane, Wisconsin, went on record as opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Bill and the extension of slavery.<sup>83</sup> While the Free Presbyterian Church condemned the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the Associate Synod protested its passage and recommended that church members unite in petitioning for its repeal.<sup>84</sup> The Associate Synod returned to the subject again in 1856, and exposed the Fugitive Slave Law "as a cruel and direct violation of the Divine law." It deplored what had happened in Kansas, and "the brutal attack ... on a member of the Senate."<sup>85</sup> A similar series of resolutions was introduced in the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Church by an Illinois delegate

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<sup>82</sup>New York Times, October 22, November 15, 1855.

<sup>83</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Dane, 1851-1870, 69. Records of the Presbytery of Chillicothe, 1846-1870, 186-188. Presbyterian of the West, April 27, 1854.

<sup>84</sup>Free Presbyterian, November 1, 1854. Evangelical Repository, XIII, No. 2 (July, 1854), 112.

<sup>85</sup>Evangelical Repository, XV, No. 2 (July, 1856), 112. National Era, July 3, 1856.



only to be withdrawn when a New York delegate "kindly appealed" to the mover not to press for adoption.<sup>86</sup> A convention of the Associate Reformed, Reformed, and Associate Churches, in 1858, protested the "curse" of imposing "the protection of slaveholding into our Territories."<sup>87</sup>

As the Kansas-Nebraska Act forced the Church into a stronger anti-slavery position, the New York Evangelist counselled moderation. "We would with all deference suggest a doubt whether any additional action is at present called for," advised the editor. But when the "Constitutional" Church held its general meeting in 1855 in St. Louis, complaints against the failure of the Southern judicatories to comply with a request for information came from the Synod of Western Reserve, ten Middle Western presbyteries and three presbyteries in up-state New York. In view of this failure, all asked for additional measures by the Church.<sup>88</sup> The Presbyteries of Indianapolis and Elyria asked that the Southern judicatories be prosecuted on the ground of "common fame." Elyria also asked that the request for

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<sup>86</sup>New York Observer, June 26, 1856.

<sup>87</sup>Evangelical Repository, XVI, No. 12 (May, 1858), 683.

<sup>88</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1855, 29. See following Records: Presbytery of Alton, 1850-1863, II, 138-39; Presbytery of Cincinnati, 1844-1870, II, 281-83; Presbytery of Hamilton, 1847-1868, 164-65.

information be renewed and if refused that the Church be divided into separate Eastern, Western, and Southern Assemblies. A letter was sent to all Southern presbyteries asking that they honor the request of the Church.<sup>89</sup> The Presbytery of Wabash, Illinois, declined fellowship with those who were involved with the Southern institution or those justifying it. They refused to send commissioners to the Assembly "in view of the past, and the dull prospect of the future." Because of many requests, Wabash reconsidered the question of sending delegates to the St. Louis meeting.<sup>90</sup> The Third Presbytery of Philadelphia "deprecated any action on the part of this body" at St. Louis.<sup>91</sup> The Assembly of 1855 appointed a committee to report to the next meeting on the constitutional power of the highest judicatory to remove slavery from the Church.<sup>92</sup> Although pointing to the hazards of division, the Presbyterian Recorder, of St. Louis, observed that this Church was the only body that had fully

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<sup>89</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Indianapolis, 1839-1863, I, 296. Records of the Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 229-230, 231, 235.

<sup>90</sup>Liberator, March 30, 1855. Central Christian Herald, May 3, 1855.

<sup>91</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1855, 30.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

discussed the sectional problem without division.<sup>93</sup> The decision to review the constitutional power of the Assembly concerning human bondage met general approval in the West.<sup>94</sup> Other judicatories asked the Assembly to use what constitutional power it had to remove slavery from the Church or to amend the constitution so that this could be accomplished.<sup>95</sup> In eastern New York the Presbytery of Champlain informed the Church that it would be satisfied with nothing except the removal of "this great iniquity" from all connection with the New School body.<sup>96</sup>

As the Presidential election of 1856 drew near, the sermons of ministers and the resolutions of the New School judicatories began to show political overtones. When the Synod of Michigan met in 1856, it was asked to express an

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<sup>93</sup>Presbyterian Recorder, I, No. 4 (July, 1855), 114.

<sup>94</sup>See Records of the following: Presbytery of Washtenaw, 1849-1862, II, 148; Presbytery of Portage, 1843-1863, 246; Presbytery of Franklin, 1846-1860, I, 241; Synod of Ohio, 1849-1869, II, 163. Minutes of the Synod of Michigan, (Detroit: G.E. Pomeroy, 1855), 14.

<sup>95</sup>See Records of the following: Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 199; Presbytery of Portage, 1843-1863, IV, 268; Presbytery of Cincinnati, 1844-1870, II, 326; Presbytery of Pataskala, 1848-1870, II, 160-61. Presbyteries of Salem and Fort Wayne: Central Christian Herald, April 17, June 5, 1856. Presbytery of Ottawa: Gould, op. cit., 182.

<sup>96</sup>Liberator, July 30, 1855.

opinion on the question of the extension of the system of servitude. The chairman of the committee, Duffield, reiterated the former testimony of the Synod and urged prayers to "remove the evils" and "avert ... the bloodshed and horror of a civil war." But such conservative counsels did not prevail; substitute resolutions were introduced from the floor denouncing the "outrage" against Senator Charles Sumner and the attacks on freedom in Kansas.<sup>97</sup> After these resolutions had passed, Duffield wrote in his diary: "I endeavored to lead them to consider the impropriety of mixing themselves up with party politics, but stood alone."<sup>98</sup> The Synod of Western Reserve regretted the tone of the discussion and weakness of measures at St. Louis at the very time "when the whole moral sentiment of the city and country was outraged by the violence of the slave power invading and proceeding to sack peaceable settlements."<sup>99</sup> Other judicatories expressed sentiments against the extension of human bondage in the

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<sup>97</sup>Minutes of the Synod of Michigan (Detroit: H. Barns, 1856), 12-13, 19-20.

<sup>98</sup>Duffield's Diary, VI, 1856-1858, 15 (June, 1856).

<sup>99</sup>Central Christian Herald, October 9, 1856.



territories.<sup>100</sup> A.L. Brooks and R. W. Patterson, both of the New School in Chicago, spoke out on the moral aspects of the question of territorial expansion.<sup>101</sup> The New York Evangelist came out for Fremont because "the only question at issue was the restriction ... of slavery within its present bounds."<sup>102</sup> The missionaries of the American Home Missionary Society stationed in the West, almost to a man, backed the Republican Party and opposed the developments in Kansas. In Illinois the lines were most completely drawn. These clergymen stood against public opinion in the southern part of the state, but often could not take a position strong enough in the northern part.<sup>103</sup> It was observed by the secular press that almost all ministers in the North supported Fremont.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> See Records of the following: Synod of Peoria, 1843-1859, I, 225, 264-65; Synod of Wabash, 1851-1869, 71; Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 287. Synod of Cincinnati: Central Christian Herald, November 13, 1856. Presbytery of Ottawa: Gould, op. cit., 182.

<sup>101</sup> Daily Democratic Press, September 18, 1856. A.T. Andreas, History of Chicago From the Earliest Period to the Present Time (3 vols., Chicago: A.T. Andreas, 1884), 418.

<sup>102</sup> Cited by Daily Democratic Press, September 3, 1856.

<sup>103</sup> AHMS Correspondence: to the Secretaries from A.S. Avery, Metropolis, Illinois, August 1, 1856; J.R. Smith, Jo Davis County, Illinois, September 18, 1856; B.F. Cole, Danville, Indiana, November 15, 1856; J.R. Dunn, Wenona, Illinois, July 2, 1856; H.D. Platt, Brighton, Illinois, August 1, 1856.

<sup>104</sup> Chicago Tribune, September 8, 1856. Daily Democratic Press, November 12, 1856.

When the "Constitutional" Assembly met in Schenectady in 1856, the committee on the constitutional power reported that the Assembly had the power to remove slavery from the Church. A minority reported that this power did not exist. After the majority statement was adopted, the minority position was permitted to be entered on the record. Forty-seven members protested this decision as tending to give the minority report standing in the Church.<sup>105</sup> The protesters were divided by regions as following: twenty-nine from the Middle West, thirteen from **up-state** New York, and five from the seaboard synods.<sup>106</sup> The Southern delegates addressed a letter to the "Constitutional" Presbyterians residing in the slaveholding states and assured them that Church action did not make slavery prima facie evidence of sin. "We believe ... the law of love demands that the relation of master and servant should exist." If the Assembly should conclude that "the relation of master and servant, in any case, is an offence," said the Southern commissioners, "we shall unitedly dissolve our connection with that body."<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1856, 197-211.

<sup>106</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1856, 216. Among the seaboard signers were: Asa D. Smith of New York; S.T. Spear, of Brooklyn; and I.N. Sprague, of Newark, New Jersey.

<sup>107</sup> New York Observer, June 5, 1856.

When both the Synod of Western Reserve and the Presbytery of Cleveland met in September, 1856, they endorsed the course of those protesting the inclusion of the minority report on the records of the Church.<sup>108</sup>

In 1856 Albert Barnes published his views on the question of the relations of the church to the Southern institution. The Church and Slavery called for an open and full discussion of the subject free from the realm of politics. "By prayer, by patience, by exhortation, by testimony and forbearance mingled with Christian fidelity ... the work may be done."<sup>109</sup> The Central Christian Herald agreed with Barnes on the power of testimony. As evidence, the editor called attention to the steadfast resistance offered by "nearly the whole of the great Atlantic cities" united with the South. But, the Herald felt, testimony was likely to separate the South from the Church rather than from slavery.<sup>110</sup> The Christian Observer agreed that

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<sup>108</sup>Records of the Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 223. Records of the Presbytery of Cleveland, 1847-1870, 154.

<sup>109</sup>Albert Barnes, The Church and Slavery (Philadelphia: Parry and McMillan, 1857), 166-67.

<sup>110</sup>Central Christian Herald, February 19, 1857.



the East would co-operate with the South to promote the welfare of the slave by entrusting the servant to the master rather than excluding the gospel from him.<sup>111</sup> The American Presbyterian, of Philadelphia, informed the brethren of Cincinnati that "the great commercial centers of the nation" had learned "to love and esteem the different sections" of the country, and were "opposed to the attempt to drive off the South by such declarations as would make it inconsistent with self-respect for them to remain with us."<sup>112</sup> The Central Christian Herald pointed to the increased moral force of the Methodist Church since 1844 and concluded that the Presbyterian Church would surely be blessed "under a similar process of cure."<sup>113</sup>

As the territorial question drew the lines more clearly over the whole nation, the New School members in the South came forward with a stronger defense of the institutions of their section. In the Buffalo meeting of 1853 Robert McLain, of Mississippi, informed the Church

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<sup>111</sup> Cited by Central Christian Herald, February 19, 1857.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., February 26, 1857.

<sup>113</sup> Central Christian Herald, April 9, 1857.



that slaves were held by as many Southern Presbyterians as could afford them.<sup>114</sup> In 1856 William E. Holley, of the Presbytery of South Lexington, Mississippi, admitted on the floor of the Assembly that he held slaves by choice and principle.<sup>115</sup> Alexander Newton, of Jackson, Mississippi, addressed a series of letters to the Christian Observer. "As were our fathers," he wrote, "so are we slaveholders from principle. Slaveholding is not a sin any more than monarchy, oligarchy, and aristocracy are sins."<sup>116</sup> When the request for information from the Southern Church was proposed in 1853, F.A. Ross, editor of the Knoxville Presbyterian Witness, made a counter-proposal asking for information from northern churches on "the number of members who seek to make money by selling ... negro clothing, handcuffs and cowhides."<sup>117</sup> At the Schenectady meeting in 1856 Ross challenged the Detroit measures of 1850 as meaning nothing:

They are a fine specimen of Northern skill in platform making .... A plank for the North, a broad board for the

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<sup>114</sup>William Hosmer, Slavery and the Church (Auburn, New York: William J. Moses, 1853), 193.

<sup>115</sup>New York Evangelist, May 14, 1857.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Chicago Daily Tribune, June 6, 1853.

South .... It is a gun-elastic  
 conscience stretching now to a  
 charity covering all the multitude  
 of our Southern sins, contracted now,  
 giving us hardly a fig-leaf  
 righteousness.<sup>118</sup>

Late in 1856 Ross printed a series of letters to Andrew Blackburn of Knoxville, Tennessee, and ran them in his own newspaper. Ross maintained that the North was racked with infidelity and the discussion of servitude would "result in the triumph of the true Southern interpretation of the Bible. The sin per se doctrine will be utterly demolished," he confidently predicted. His letters were widely reprinted.<sup>119</sup> He approved the position of Newton and wrote a series of letters to the Christian Observer in answer to Albert Barnes' recent book. He defended slavery as a Bible institution.<sup>120</sup>

The New School Synod of Mississippi, in 1856, found the agitation in the Church crippling its efforts and influence. This agitation was "unjust, oppressive, and unwarranted by the Word of God." The Synod voted to form a committee to correspond with other Southern judicatories for the purpose of forming a Southern Assembly. The Presbytery of Hanover, Virginia, decided to separate "if

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<sup>118</sup> F.A. Ross, Slavery Ordained of God (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1857), 65.

<sup>119</sup> Liberator, September 5, 1856.

<sup>120</sup> New York Evangelist, May 21, 1857.

agitation should be continued."<sup>121</sup> It was "an unquestionable fact, that the public mind in the South" regarded the relation between master and servant to be "sanctioned by the Word of God," stated the Presbytery of Shiloh, Tennessee.<sup>122</sup> As the political struggle became more bitter, the New School men and churches in the South were pushed into a stronger position in defense of slavery not demanded of the Old School Presbyterians. They were forced to try to live down the reputation of the "Constitutional" Church as an abolitionist church.

As a result of the feeling that slavery was expanding and the defense of servitude was growing, the western church moved to a position of demanding discipline. The Presbytery of Portage asked the Synod of Western Reserve to withdraw and become independent if no decisive measures were taken in 1857.<sup>123</sup> The Synod agreed, and memorialized the Assembly to send down a requisition to the Synod of Mississippi to enjoin upon the Presbytery of Lexington, South, to take steps to discipline W.E. Holley, one of its

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<sup>121</sup>New York Observer, August 21, October 23, 1856.

<sup>122</sup>New York Evangelist, May 14, 1857.

<sup>123</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Portage, 1843-1863, IV, 276.

members. The ground for the charge was the statements made by Holley on the floor of the Assembly in 1856. All of the presbyteries were asked to take similar action.<sup>124</sup>

After the death of Holley early in 1857, the Presbytery of Lexington, South, adopted resolutions that all of its members were open to the same charge that Western Reserve had made against him.<sup>125</sup> Other judicatories made similar

charges against Holley and also against Robert McLain, of Newton, Mississippi, Alexander Newton, of Clinton, Mississippi, and F.A. Ross, of Richland, Tennessee.<sup>126</sup>

The Presbyteries of Illinois and Springfield and the Synod of Illinois asked for a statement that would counteract the circular issued by the Southern delegates to the Assembly of 1856. These judicatories also requested that the churches be enjoined to consider slavery prima facie evidence of unfitness for membership in the

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<sup>124</sup>Central Christian Herald, October 9, 1856. Records of the Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 215.

<sup>125</sup>New York Evangelist, May 14, 1857.

<sup>126</sup>See Records of the following: Presbytery of Cleveland, 1847-1870, 161-64; Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 297-99; Presbytery of Grand River, 1849-1867, III, 157; Presbytery of Portage, 1843-1863, IV, 281-82; Synod of Wabash, 1851-1869, 70-72; Synod of Indiana, 1846-1857, II, 198-201. Presbytery of Huron: Moore, op. cit., 189.



Church.<sup>127</sup> The Synod of Cincinnati united with others in calling for discipline and asked for the adoption of a Declaration and Testimony to answer "the erroneous impressions" spread abroad.<sup>128</sup> The Central Christian Herald called for united action on the Cincinnati resolutions,<sup>129</sup> and several western presbyteries adopted the measures.<sup>130</sup> Immediate discipline was demanded by the Presbyteries of Peoria and Knox, and Ottawa. The latter proposed to withdraw from the Church if prosecution was not started. The former invoked the Assembly to propose and secure a separation from the South if the peace and purity of the Church could be better attained in this way.<sup>131</sup> Memorials were sent up from other judicatories in the West

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<sup>127</sup> Records of the Presbytery of Springfield, 1856-1866, IV, 5-6. Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1856-1869, II, 17-18. AHMS Correspondence: C.L. Watson to D.B. Coe, Sangamon County, Illinois, October 11, 1856.

<sup>128</sup> Central Christian Herald, November 13, 1856.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., March 19, 1857.

<sup>130</sup> See Records of the following: Presbytery of Salem, 1841-1861, II, 423-24; Presbytery of Hamilton, 1847-1868, 188-90; Presbytery of Pataskala, 1848-1870, II, 172; Presbytery of Schuyler, 1856-1870, 10-11. Presbytery of Ottawa: Gould, op. cit., 186-87. Records of the Presbytery of Kalamazoo, 1850-1865, II, 114.

<sup>131</sup> Gould, op. cit., 186-87. Presbytery Reporter, IV, No. 1 (July, 1857), 29.

asking for strong measures.<sup>132</sup> In the East the Fourth Presbytery of New York spoke out on slavery. It protested against the interpretation of the action of 1856 as receding from an anti-slavery position and testimony. The Presbytery declared property in man to be "essentially opposed to the rights of man, to the welfare of the Republic, ... and to the principles of the Christian religion."<sup>133</sup> A total of twenty-eight memorials were sent to the General Assembly, including twenty-three from the Middle West, three from New York, one from Pennsylvania, and one from Mississippi.<sup>134</sup>

When the General Assembly convened in Cleveland in May, 1857, Robert McLain and F.A. Ross were on hand to defend themselves. Ross maintained that the Bible sanctioned slavery. "It is a relation belonging to the same category as those of husband and wife," he said. "The evils in the system are the same evils of oppression we see in the

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<sup>132</sup>Presbyteries of Dayton and Franklin: Central Christian Herald, October 23, 1856, April 16, 1857. Records of the Presbytery of Pataskola, 1848-1870, II, 165. Records of the Convention of Wisconsin, 1840-1861, I, 343.

<sup>133</sup>Elizabeth L. Smith (ed.), Henry Boynton Smith, His Life and Letters (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1881), 434.

<sup>134</sup>Presbyterian Quarterly Review, VI, No. 22 (September, 1857), 233: Ohio 11, Illinois 5, Indiana 3, Michigan 2, Iowa 1, Wisconsin 1, New York 3, Pennsylvania 1, and Mississippi 1. In the New York Observer, June 4, 1857: Indiana was listed with 8.

relation of husband and wife, and all other forms of government." Ross pronounced a long eulogium on Gerard Hallock, of the Journal of Commerce, who supported him in this position.<sup>135</sup> When the report of the committee on slavery was presented, it was accepted by a large majority. It censured the official notice to the Assembly from the Presbytery of Lexington, South, which admitted that members of this presbytery held slaves "from principle, believing it to be according to the Bible." A group of Southern delegates protested against the measures of the Church as "the virtual excising of the South."<sup>136</sup> While still in Cleveland, the Southern delegation met and drew up an "Address" to the Church.<sup>137</sup> The Southern commissioners announced that they were withdrawing from the Church because of the unconstitutional measures adopted at the Cleveland meeting. This address fastened the blame for the current troubles in the Church on the western judicatories by declaring:

In consequence of the political agitation of the subject and the pressure brought to bear upon them by Congregational churches holding most ultra abolition sentiments, many of our western presbyteries have become more urgent in demanding progressive action of the Assembly .... They have desired the Assembly to express its views of the

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<sup>135</sup> Central Christian Herald, May 28, 1857.

<sup>136</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1857, 403-406.

<sup>137</sup> New York Observer, June 11, 1857.

sin of slaveholding so clearly,  
that they can be made the basis  
of discipline by the courts of  
the Church.

The address called for a meeting of all Presbyterians opposed to the agitation of the sectional controversy to meet in Washington, but later changed to Richmond, to organize a new General Assembly.<sup>138</sup> The convention of the Southern New School Presbyterians met at Richmond and formally withdrew from the "Constitutional" Church. They adopted measures declaring slavery to be an institution of the state that did not properly belong "to the Church judicatories as a subject for discussion and inquiry." A meeting was called to convene in Knoxville, Tennessee, during April, 1858, to organize the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church.<sup>139</sup> When the Knoxville meeting opened, measures were again voted which pronounced slavery essentially a political question that should be left to the civil

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<sup>138</sup>Presbyterian Quarterly Review, VI, No. 22, (September, 1857), 246.

<sup>139</sup>Presbyterian Magazine, VII (October, 1857), 433-439.



authorities of the land to settle.<sup>140</sup> The United Synod of the Presbyterian Church contained 108 ministers, 187 churches, and 10,877 communicants in 1859.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Presbyterian Quarterly Review, VII, No. 25 (July, 1858), 124.

<sup>141</sup>Thomas C. Johnson, A Brief Sketch of the United Synod of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, in Papers of the American Society of Church History, Samuel M. Jackson, ed., (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), 24.

CHAPTER V  
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
AND THE AMERICAN HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY

During the 1840's the American Home Missionary Society, so far as public announcements were concerned, generally maintained a studied silence concerning its relation with the system of servitude. In answer to private correspondence, however, it maintained the position that it had taken during the 1830's. The answer the Society made to an inquiry from Lewis Tappan, July 18, 1844, was typical of the response it gave to private requests for information. Tappan wanted to know whether money was accepted from slaveholders, whether missionaries in the South preached against human bondage, and whether aid had ever been refused to churches which tolerated the institution. Milton Badger, one of the secretaries of the Society, informed his abolitionist correspondent that only a small part of its funds came from the South. He did not know what portion, if any, came from slaveholders. There were no specific instructions to missionaries as to what those living in the South should preach and no church had been denied aid because of its relations to the Southern institution.<sup>1</sup> But this same year

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<sup>1</sup>AHMS Correspondence, Letter Book R, 312, July 27, 1844.

the Society recognized that difficulties to the expansion of religion in the South existed. "Another obstacle -- and one of increasing magnitude -- which may well fill the heart of philanthropy with deep concern, is the existence of that horrible anomaly in American institutions, slavery," reported the Society.<sup>2</sup> Although the AHMS did not employ slaveholders as missionaries,<sup>3</sup> the collection of funds in the South and support of churches connected with the institution caused dissension in the Middle West. In 1844 a missionary at De Witt, Iowa, resigned his commission because funds came from the South.<sup>4</sup>

By 1845 the question of abolition had become the most distracting force among the missionaries in the Middle West. The rising interest in the question of emancipation and its relation to the voluntary societies were soon to lead to a hearing before the Church courts and in conventions outside the framework of Church government. In 1845 the Synod of Indiana was asked whether churches under its

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<sup>2</sup>The Eighteenth Report of the American Home Missionary Society, 1844 (Home Missionary Society: New York, 1844), 95.

<sup>3</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Arthemus Bullard to Milton Badger, St. Louis, December 24, 1844; Isaac W.K. Handy to Milton Badger, Berlin, Maryland, April 26, 1844.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., O. Emerson to Secretaries, De Witt, Iowa, August 16, 1844.

jurisdiction should contribute money to benevolent societies which employed agents to solicit funds from slaveholders and used a portion of the revenue to build up and sustain churches that received slaveholders. The Synod declared that it could not "approve of the organization of churches, ... by any body, on the principle of sanctioning slaveholding." It was hoped that the societies would soon be "conducted ... so as to be manifestly ... opposed to all sinful practices, and slaveholding among the rest." But for the time the Synod knew "of no better, purer, safer, more intelligent or more efficient agents" than the national societies.<sup>5</sup>

The Presbyterian and Congregational Convention of Wisconsin, in 1847, addressed a letter to all ecclesiastical bodies with which it was in correspondence asking them to urge upon the various benevolent societies the importance of taking decided action against slavery.<sup>6</sup> During the same year the Presbytery of Elyria called on the missionary boards to refuse membership in mission churches to those holding their fellow men in bondage.<sup>7</sup> The AHMS responded to the growing interest in the subject by including an

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<sup>5</sup>Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1826-1845, I, 356-58.

<sup>6</sup>Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, I, 181.

<sup>7</sup>Watchman, June 24, 1847.



article in the Home Missionary which detailed reports from missionaries showing how servitude was holding back the progress of religion.<sup>8</sup> The executive committee of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions made a report of its investigation on the status of servitude in the Indian Missions. When the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention of Wisconsin learned in 1848 of the efforts of the American Board to free its churches of slavery, the Convention urged the AHMS to take "similar action in reference to the missionaries and churches ... receiving their patronage."<sup>9</sup>

In 1845 Arthemus Bullard, missionary agent for Missouri, journeyed to the East to raise \$10,000 as a loan to help destitute churches in Missouri. The Watchman of the Valley commented on the project undertaken by Bullard, and added that it hoped the Society had "wisdom enough not to assume the position of a church extension loan-office for building churches" involved in the Southern institution. The Society should not "do anything to embarrass the Church in its efforts to remove entirely the stain of slavery."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Home Missionary, XX, No. 1 (May, 1847), 3.

<sup>9</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Stephen Peet to Badger and Charles Hall, Beloit, Wisconsin, October 31, 1848.

<sup>10</sup> Watchman, August 7, 1845.

But Bullard's efforts were prompted by the inadequacy of aid through the normal channels of the Society, which, he said, was falsely attributed to the inability to find men willing to go to the South and become involved in its local problems. He accused the AHMS of sending men to other states despite the fact that they desired to go to Missouri. Bullard interpreted the Society's failure adequately to supply Missouri with missionaries as being motivated by a desire to build up Congregationalism at the expense of Presbyterianism in the Southwest. Unless a different policy were adopted, Bullard threatened to appeal to the Presbyterian Church to form a missionary society of its own.<sup>11</sup> The Presbyterian Church had already set up a standing committee on home missions at the adjourned meeting of 1847 after the Congregationalists had moved away from the plan of union at the Michigan City Convention of the previous year. In 1852 a standing committee on church extension was constituted, and three years later the church extension committee decreased the support of the AHMS while the Congregationalists increased their aid. Thus, says Frederick Kuhns, the slavery controversy was "inextricably bound up with the church extension policies of these two

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<sup>11</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Arthemus Bullard to Secretaries, St. Louis, August 19, 1847.

denominations."<sup>12</sup> The Christian Observer expressed a hope in 1849 that the AHMS would extend a more liberal and impartial hand in the support of faithful laborers in the South and Southwest, and that the sacred work should not be "marred by the least appearance of sectional prejudice or feeling."<sup>13</sup> Later, the Christian Observer returned to the subject of its charge of sectional prejudice by showing that the free states had more missionaries per population than the Southern states.<sup>14</sup> Charges of this kind were fairly numerous; for in February, 1849, the Home Missionary reported that two or three times a year newspaper editorials, or correspondents, reminded the Society that it had very few field workers in the Southern states while the free states numbered, in some cases, a hundred each. It submitted extracts of letters from agents in the South to show the difficulties they must meet there. According to one letter, if pastors came out openly, and avowed "hostility

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<sup>12</sup> Frederick Kuhns, "Slavery and Missions in the Old Northwest," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXIV, No. 4 (December, 1946), 206.

<sup>13</sup> Cited by Independent, May 3, 1849.

<sup>14</sup> Cited by Independent, June 14, 1849. New York with 2,880,000 inhabitants had 187 missionaries; Virginia with 1,295,000 had only 5; Illinois with 800,000 had 101; Missouri with 589,000 had only 21; Ohio with 1,980,000 had 102; Kentucky with 890,000 had only 9.

to the 'sacred' institution," all hope of doing good would be thwarted; and "a speedy passport from the country" would be insured.<sup>15</sup> T.S. Reeve, of St. Joseph, Missouri, wrote the AHMS in 1850 asking for a larger quota of missionaries in that part of Missouri, but he warned the Society that they must be the kind "who will let ... slavery alone, save to bear upon it the express injunction of Paul." The letter was printed unsigned in the Home Missionary under the title "Men Wanted 'of the Right Stamp.'" The Society answered the letter by saying that it must be left to the pastors to decide "the occasion and the way in which they will bring the Gospel to bear on this and every other evil."<sup>16</sup>

One of the reasons for calling the Presbyterian and Congregational Conventions was the belief that church judicatories could not act on questions involving the voluntary societies since these organizations transcended denominational lines. If these societies were to be freed of evils, it was thought to be necessary to put pressure on them outside of the church courts. In almost all of the conventions the question of the relation of the AHMS to the Southern

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<sup>15</sup>Home Missionary, XXI, No. 10 (February, 1849), 233.

<sup>16</sup>AHMS Correspondence: T.S. Reeve to Badger, St. Joseph, Missouri, August 6, 1850. Home Missionary, XXIII, No. 7 (November, 1850), 159-60.



institution came up for consideration. The Society generally had an agent present at the conventions who gave assurance of a desire to clear the organization of any connection with social evils. En route to the Detroit Convention of 1845, a Society secretary, Charles Hall, wrote the home office, "I dread that convention. What with abolition, ... Presbyterian and Congregational sectarianism ... I expect to meet more enemies than friends."<sup>17</sup> A delegate from the Synod of Indiana expressed a desire to have the relations of human bondage with the benevolent societies clearly defined at the convention.<sup>18</sup> But that body voted only mild resolutions. Jonathan Blanchard, president of Knox College, and G.W. Bassett, of the Presbytery of Ottawa, were not satisfied with the measures adopted. The resolutions stood despite the fact that Blanchard contended that, "The language should be clearer and more explicit."<sup>19</sup> At the Philadelphia Convention of Western Presbyterians in 1846, the question of the relations of the Society to the problems of emancipation came up, but no measures directly

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<sup>17</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Hall to Badger, June 11, 1845.

<sup>18</sup> Watchman, May 8, 1845.

<sup>19</sup> New York Observer, July 5, 1845. Watchman, July 31, 1845.

bearing on Home Missions were adopted.<sup>20</sup> Action was taken, however, at the convention of Granville, Illinois, in 1846, declaring it morally wrong for missionary societies to receive funds from forced labor, and the relation of the Society to the Southern institution was thoroughly discussed at the Akron convention the next year.<sup>21</sup> Finally, in 1847, strong measures were rejected at the Chicago convention.<sup>22</sup>

The failure of the benevolent societies to take action resulted in the founding of the American Missionary Association, a Congregational organization, in 1846. After the Free Presbyterian Synod was organized, the Western Home and Foreign Missionary Association was formed in Cincinnati to compete with the older societies.<sup>23</sup> Flavel Bascom, of the Presbyterian Church of Galesburg, Illinois, wrote that he feared the Western Home and Foreign Missionary Association would "cover the West with its agencies and ... everywhere reap the fields ... cleared and fenced and tilled for years" by the AHMS. He advised the Society

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<sup>20</sup>Watchman, February 12, 1846. New York Observer, May 30, 1846.

<sup>21</sup>Western Citizen, November 3, 1846. Ohio Observer, February 24, 1847.

<sup>22</sup>Western Citizen, July 13, 1847. Herald of the Prairie, June 23, 1847.

<sup>23</sup>Central Christian Herald, October 3, 1850.

officers to avoid collision with the Western Home and Foreign Missionary Association by "stealing its thunder." The Cincinnati society had made a collection in the church at Galesburg, but Bascom claimed that he and Jonathan Blanchard had exercised no influence on this decision.<sup>24</sup> A correspondent informed the Society that Bascom and Blanchard's objective was not to kill the AHMS "but to give it a sweat."<sup>25</sup>

As the culmination of a drive in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois, Blanchard contacted others in 1851 and planned a massive petition program promoted through the columns of the Christian Era, Congregational monthly at Galesburg, Illinois. The petition called on the Executive Committee of the AHMS to support no churches containing slaveholders.<sup>26</sup> Albert Hale, agent and member of the Presbytery of Springfield, received a copy of the petition and wrote the Society asking for a clarification of its position. He was for refusing aid to new churches containing those involved in "the peculiar institution"

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<sup>24</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Bascom to Secretaries, Galesburg, Illinois, January 9, June 8, 1851.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., William Carter to Badger, Pittsfield, Illinois, May 4, 1851.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., S.D. Helms to J.C. Holbrook, Cottonville, Illinois, March 6, 1851. Christian Era, I (February 24, 1851).

but would not go so far as the petition. When the secretaries explained the situation, he promised to back them.<sup>27</sup>

William Kirby, a Presbyterian of Jacksonville, Illinois, asked the Society to act, and gave assurance the churches would back it. He looked on the petition with favor.

Not a church in his agency, he believed, would be alienated.<sup>28</sup> Aratus Kent, agent of Galena, and from the Presbytery of that name, wrote the secretaries, "The time will come when the AHMS must take a stand that they will not commission men to labour in slaveholding churches."<sup>29</sup>

Several Congregational missionaries asked for action and gave assurance that the West would back the Society.<sup>30</sup>

But, with the increased pressure for action, the AHMS fell back on the old formula that the Society's constitution did not allow it to exercise ecclesiastical

<sup>27</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Albert Hale to Badger, Springfield, Illinois, March 13, April 21, 1851.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., William Kirby to Badger, Jacksonville, Illinois, April 4, 1851.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Kent to Badger, Galena, Illinois, July 12, 1851.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., James Longhead to Badger, Morris, Illinois, October 7, 1851. Levi Spencer to Badger, Peoria, Illinois, October 5, 1851. S.H. Wright to Badger, Tonlon, Illinois, July 1, 1851.



authority.<sup>31</sup> At the general church convocation of the Presbyterian Church at Utica in May, 1851, D.B. Coe, one of the AHMS secretaries, urged the Church to act and informed the meeting: "Many churches in the West which have been so restless and restive on account of the relations of this Assembly to slavery ... have been kept in your ranks mainly by their dependence of the H[ome] M[issionary] Soc[ety]."<sup>32</sup> As the annual meeting of the AHMS approached, the Prairie Herald warned: "We will accept no apologies, such as that 'slavery is too strong for the Gospel' ... or that the 'Society is not doing as it ought, but that it is doing the best it can.'" The editor followed this with a similar editorial the next week and informed the AHMS that this was the only position that could be taken in the West.<sup>33</sup>

A Christian anti-slavery convention was held in Cincinnati in 1850, and a second meeting convened in Chicago the next year. Jonathan Blanchard was chairman of the Chicago meeting. Out of 257 delegates to it only about eighteen were Presbyterians, mostly of the Free Presbyterian

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., Letter Book X, Badger to William Carter, April 21, 1851, No. 2308; Badger to Albert Hale, April 21, 1851, No. 2309, No. 2366.

<sup>32</sup>Independent, June 19, 1851.

<sup>33</sup>Prairie Herald, July 22, 1851. AHMS Correspondence: J.A. Wight to Badger, Chicago, Illinois, July 29, 1851.

Church. The American Home Missionary Society was urged to withdraw from the South. The Chicago Christian anti-slavery convention backed the new organizations that opposed the AHMS. A few days prior to this meeting a missionary convention was held by the supporters of the AHMS and the ABCFM, with J.M. Sturtevant, president of Illinois College, as chairman. None of the secretaries of the Home Mission Society attended this meeting. It was generally considered that the AHMS suffered a loss of prestige that might have been diverted if someone from the home office had been there. The convocation adopted mild resolutions in opposition to any relation that implied approval of slavery, but many wanted measures asking the AHMS explicitly to refuse support to any new churches that sustained the Southern institution.<sup>34</sup>

In 1853 when the General Assembly requested information on the Southern churches in relation to slavery, the AHMS quietly began to collect information from the missionaries in the South on that subject.<sup>35</sup> During the same

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<sup>34</sup>Prairie Herald, June 24, July 1, 8, 1851. AHMS Correspondence: Aratus Kent to Badger, Rockford, Illinois, July 12, 1851. Western Citizen, March 18, 1851.

<sup>35</sup>AHMS Correspondence: L.C. Brown to Secretaries, Dug Spur, Virginia, March 10, 1853; Robert Gray to Badger, Franklin County, Virginia, January 3, 1853. W.A. Taylor to Badger, Lee County, Virginia, July 12, 1853. C.T. Thrift, Jr., "The Operation of the American Home Missionary Society in the South, 1826-1861," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1936), 207.

year the Society took a stronger position in the Home Missionary. Its policy was stated as being that of employing no slaveholders and releasing missionaries who came to occupy this status. The missionaries themselves were the proper agencies for deciding when the gospel would be brought "to bear on this and every other evil."<sup>36</sup> The Ohio Observer editorially declared this policy to be a "course of action which to us is satisfactory."<sup>37</sup> But many of the Reserve did not agree with the views of the Observer as was evinced by the increased problem of finding contributions in this field.<sup>38</sup>

The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act during the next year soon brought the Society to decisive action. In the annual report of the AHMS for 1856 slavery was given as the cause for the failure of the churches in Missouri to expand as rapidly as those in the Middle West. In reference to the activities of a portion of the people in Missouri "to force" the Southern institution into Kansas, the report concluded, "Nothing could well be more pernicious

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<sup>36</sup> Home Missionary, XXV, No. 11 (March, 1853), 266.

<sup>37</sup> Ohio Observer, March 9, 1853.

<sup>38</sup> AHMS Correspondence: J.H. Newton, agent to Secretaries, Cleveland, Ohio, April 1, May 1, 1856. D.A. Grosvenor to Secretaries, Madino, Ohio, April 1, 1856.

to the cause of religion and good morals than an effort like this."<sup>39</sup> During the same year the Home Missionary characterized the system of holding man as property as being "a curse to all concerned in it, and an enemy to God and man."<sup>40</sup> In a letter to a Congregational clergyman and agent in Wisconsin, in November, 1856, D.B. Coe said that the executive committee aimed at avoiding all complicity in the problems of servitude. But the Society could not go in advance of churches in matters of ecclesiastical policy. "We mean to go as far as we can without exceeding our power," Coe assured the missionary.<sup>41</sup>

During the early 1850's while the judicatories of the Presbyterian Church remained silent or expressed confidence in the AHMS as the Presbytery of Franklin and the Synod of Michigan did,<sup>42</sup> the Congregational Associations of Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan expressed a desire to see the American Home Missionary Society free itself from

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<sup>39</sup> Thirtieth Report of the American Home Missionary Society (New York: John A. Gray, 1856), 78-79.

<sup>40</sup> Home Missionary, XXIX, No. 1 (May, 1856), 5.

<sup>41</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Letter Book, 1856-1857, II, No. 1444, D.B. Coe to Richard Hall.

<sup>42</sup> Records of the Presbytery of Franklin, 1846-1860, I, 149, 241. Records of the Synod of Michigan, 1851-1853, II, 286.



entanglements with slavery.<sup>43</sup> It was easy for the Congregationalists to take a strong position as they had no ties with churches in the South. The Iowa resolution of 1855 was referred to a special committee of the Society, and in December, 1856, the AHMS executive committee adopted a rule that financial aid would not be granted "to churches containing slaveholding members" unless it could be proven that the relation was sustained for the benefit of the servant.<sup>44</sup> The new rule was first made public through the columns of the Chicago Congregational Herald, but the home office soon got off letters to all agents explaining its action. The growing tendency to defend the Southern institution on principle and to justify it by scripture was said to be the reason for the new measure. The action was claimed to be following only the ecclesiastical grounds taken by the Presbyterian Church in 1850 and 1853. Increased opposition to the Society in the South, and the activity of the Southern Aid Society reduced the number of churches in the South looking for aid to a very nominal figure.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> AHMS Correspondence: S.D. Helms to Badger, Jackson County, Iowa, April 7, 1851. Records of the Synod of Michigan, 1851-1853, II, 286.

<sup>44</sup> Central Christian Herald, February 19, 1857.  
New York Observer, March 12, 1857.

<sup>45</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter No. 2308, March 10, 11, 1857. Badger to Edgar Ketchum, Letter No. 2548, April 13, 1857.

In 1851 the Synod of Mississippi set up its own missionary society as a result of the failure to get aid through the national society. In 1853 this example was followed by the Domestic Missionary Society of the Synod of Virginia. The following year a group met in New York and organized the Southern Aid Society.<sup>46</sup> Its constitution stated that it was organized to take over where the AHMS "paused or faltered." The Address of the Society declared the organization was created because of the rule that slaveholders could not serve the AHMS, and because the Home Missionary Society was generally considered to be closely allied with abolitionism. Many of the New School Presbyterian Churches in the South and Southwest were said to be destitute since they had received no aid from any society for several years.<sup>47</sup> At the organizational meeting fifty-one ministers were in attendance. Included in this number were seventeen New School and six Old School ministers from

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<sup>46</sup> New York Observer, May 31, 1855: see "Assembly Debate." First Annual Report of the Southern Aid Society, (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1854), 18.

<sup>47</sup> Southern Aid Society: Its Constitution and Address to the Christian Public (New York: D. Fanshaw, 1854), 8-9.

the East. One delegate was from Western Reserve and one from western New York, both representing the New School. Eleven "Constitutional" Presbyterians from the South were present and the remaining fifteen were scattered from among other denominations.<sup>48</sup> The Society was very closely tied to the business interests of New York. The New York Tribune called it "a pet of the Journal of Commerce." Gerard Hallock was one of the founders and its treasurer.<sup>49</sup> Joseph C. Stiles, its general agent, said it aimed at collecting the missionary contributions of the conservatives which did not go to the other societies.<sup>50</sup> Stiles was later replaced by Robert Baird, a member of the "Reformed" Assembly from New Jersey. The Presbyter, of Cincinnati, was critical of the participation of the Old School Presbyterians. When Baird pointed out that laymen of his Church, such as Horace Holden, of New York, participated in the Society because they could do more in this organization, the Presbyter replied that they "may do more for the fall and spring trade of New York City" but would do less in sending pure

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<sup>48</sup>First Annual Report of the Southern Aid Society, 1854, 4.

<sup>49</sup>New York Tribune, October 31, 1854.

<sup>50</sup>New York Observer, October 4, 1855.

gospel to the South.<sup>51</sup> Both before and after the rule of 1856 was adopted by the AHMS, the existence of the Southern Aid Society served as an excuse for denying aid to Southern churches that were involved in the system of human bondage.<sup>52</sup>

Early in 1857 the AHMS began to take up the case of each church involved in the Southern institution to determine which should be retained in the missionary organization.<sup>53</sup> But the Society met determined opposition from the East. The American Presbyterian, of Philadelphia, agreed with the Louisville Presbyterian Herald that the Society's rule was "an assumption of power that no real Presbyterian ought to submit to for a moment."<sup>54</sup> The New York Evangelist joined the more conservative Presbyterian Journals and protested "against the whole thing from beginning to end." It was "a gross assumption of power never

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<sup>51</sup>Presbyter, February 9, 1860. Formerly, Presbyterian of the West.

<sup>52</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Flavel Bascom to Badger, Galesburg, Illinois, March 9, 1854. Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter No. 2308.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter No. 5, Coe to Benjamin Mills, Macedonia, Kentucky, May 5, 1857. Letter No. 2120, February 16, 1857 and No. 2543, April 10, 1857, Badger to L.R. Morrison, Cross Timbers, Missouri.

<sup>54</sup>Cited by New York Observer, March 19, 1857.



conceded to them."<sup>55</sup> The Christian Observer warned: "Do they not know that the unscriptural dogma upon which their action is based, is loathed as nothing better than error and folly, in many of the northern churches ...?"<sup>56</sup> The New York Evangelist returned to the subject to inform the AHMS that "a voluntary society is not an arbitrary society" which can consult only its "own will," and a week later the editor accused the Mission Executive Committee of trying "to subjugate the Presbyterian Church."<sup>57</sup> The response of the Presbyterian press to the new rule was "one of the most gratifying and encouraging signs of the times," according to the New York Observer, and the editor added, "The churches will not bow the knee to the Baal of abolitionism."<sup>58</sup>

"The passive consent to be encroached upon and run over, by independency and fanaticism, is no longer ... the peculiar besetting sin of the Constitutional Presbyterian Church," protested the Genesee Evangelist. "There is one prevailing sentiment on the subject in this section among ministry

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<sup>55</sup>New York Evangelist, March 26, 1857.

<sup>56</sup>Cited by New York Observer, March 19, 1857.

<sup>57</sup>New York Evangelist, April 2, 9, 1857.

<sup>58</sup>New York Observer, April 16, 1857.

and laity," added the editor.<sup>59</sup> "This action," concluded the New York Observer, "is evidently an appeal to a blind and indiscreet zeal, whose error time will expose."<sup>60</sup> The Central Christian Herald stood alone. "It is ... in strict accordance with the spirit of the resolutions of the General Assembly at Detroit in 1850. We do not see how our Church can, with any propriety, object to the action of the Society," said the editor.<sup>61</sup> "Your statement of the principles on which this action is justified is admirable, and will commend itself to the great body of our denomination," D.B. Coe wrote to the Herald's editor.<sup>62</sup>

Almost all of the correspondents from the East opposed the action of the Executive Committee. A contributor from New Jersey, who approved the rule, wrote the secretaries, "I know not of another one in this region who is with me."<sup>63</sup> But he was wrong; at least one other minister of

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<sup>59</sup>Cited by New York Observer, April 16, 1857.

<sup>60</sup>New York Observer, May 14, 1857.

<sup>61</sup>Central Christian Herald, February 16, 1857.

<sup>62</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter No. 2305, Coe to C.E. Babb, March 10, 1857.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., James Baggs to Coe, Fairton, New Jersey, July 21, 1857. See W.H. Price to Secretaries, New York City, July 15, 1857.

New Jersey spoke up for the decision and wrote the Society to this effect.<sup>64</sup> The powerful voice of Jonathan Stearns, in the Presbytery of Newark, had been raised against the Society.<sup>65</sup> When the eastern presbyteries met, the sentiments expressed by the journals and in correspondence to the AHMS were made Church decisions. Only in the Third Presbytery of New York was there a division of opinion. The debate occupied the larger portion of three days. This was because the Third Presbytery's membership included D.B. Coe, A.D. Smith, C.R. Robert, and Edwin Hatfield, all members of the Executive Committee of the AHMS. The whole question was eventually indefinitely postponed.<sup>66</sup> The Presbytery of Newark considered the rule as "striking a perilous blow at the independence of all the mission churches in the exercise of rights given exclusively to them by the Great Head of the Church."<sup>67</sup> Similar action was taken by the Third and Fourth Presbyteries of Philadelphia and the Presbytery of

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., D.G. Sprague to Coe, South Orange, New Jersey, May 16, 1857.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., A.C. Frissell to Coe, May 4, 1857.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter No. 2457, Badger to P.H. Fowler, March 30, 1857. New York Evangelist, May 21, 1857.

<sup>67</sup>New York Observer, May 7, 1857.

Montrose.<sup>68</sup> The Philadelphia auxiliary of the AHMS took a position opposed to the action of the Executive Committee. Robert Adair, corresponding secretary of the Philadelphia branch, wrote A.D. Smith: "In this city and vicinity there is but one mind among the ministers and laymen on this subject. All regard it as the introduction of a new policy ... one that conflicts with the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church."<sup>69</sup> The Philadelphia branch circulated a petition against the decision, gathering signatures from as far as western New York.<sup>70</sup> Badger could well declare, "Philadelphia is upon us like a thousand brick[s]"<sup>71</sup>

In western and central New York councils were divided. The strong voice of William Wisner spoke out against the Home Mission rule. He was expected to carry

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<sup>68</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Theodore Spencer to Badger, Utica, New York, May 4, 1857. New York Evangelist, April 30, 1857.

<sup>69</sup> A.D. Smith, Home Missions and Slavery (New York: John A. Gray, 1857), 4.

<sup>70</sup> AHMS Correspondence: John A. Murray to Secretaries, Geneva, New York, May, 1857.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter No. 2353, Badger to Albert Hale, March 13, 1857.



many with him.<sup>72</sup> The course of central New York was still doubtful.<sup>73</sup> Theodore Spencer, agent of Utica, New York, was not sure the action was desirable. "We have not much trouble now, on this field," in relation to slavery, he wrote to Badger.<sup>74</sup> John A. Murray, agent for the Geneva, New York, area warned the home office that something should be published to show the reasons for the adoption of the late rule. The press opposed the Society. "Men are making up their minds on the subject -- and as they do not think for themselves, they are influenced by what they read," advised Murray.<sup>75</sup> Asa D. Smith wrote a series of letters to the Presbyterian journals in defense of the position of the Executive Committee. These were reprinted and distributed widely.<sup>76</sup> The executive secretaries got busy and a pamphlet,

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., J.A. Murray to Secretaries, Geneva, New York, May 18, 1857.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., J.B. Shaw, Rochester, May 8, 1857; Daniel Gibbs, Ripley, May 9, 1857; A.C. Frissell, South Amenia, May 4, 1857; D.M. Seward, Yonkers, April 10, 1857; Ashbel Parmelee, Malone, March 27, 1857; Thomas Larcorn, Andes, May 14, 1857; P.H. Fowler, Utica, March 21, 1857.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., Spencer to Badger, Utica, New York, March 5, 1857.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., Murray to Secretaries, Geneva, New York, March 21, 1857.

<sup>76</sup>See note 69, page 244.

"The Position of the Southern Church in Relation to Slavery," was sent to western New York for distribution. The home office denied all responsibility for the pamphlet but admitted it had been authored by Asa D. Smith. The publication was "designed to meet the opposition from the conservative side."<sup>77</sup> After receiving twenty-five copies, Theodore Spencer informed Badger that he had "distributed them to good purpose" and asked for more since the mischief that the Evangelist had been doing had begun to show.<sup>78</sup> When the spring meetings of the presbyteries were held, Genesee and Niagara opposed the new rule,<sup>79</sup> and Champlain, Utica, Cortland, Otsego, and the Board of Missions of the Presbytery of Rochester approved the measures of the Executive Committee.<sup>80</sup>

Asa D. Smith took the position that the decision of the Executive Committee was necessary because "the Kansas

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<sup>77</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter No. 2664, Coe to W.H. Goodrich, April 28, 1857.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Spencer to Badger, April 10, 15, 18, 1857. Letter Book, 1857, III, No. 2565, April 15, 1857.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., J.A. Murray to Secretaries, June 3, 1857. New York Evangelist, May 7, 1857.

<sup>80</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Spencer to Badger, April 22, May 15, June 18, 22, 1857. J.A. Murray to Secretaries, May 6, 1857.

outrage and the late decision of the Supreme Court" had aroused a spirit in the North and West which forced a choice. "It is vastly more to our interest to retain the Great West than the feeble and plague-stricken South," he wrote. Smith included letters from the West in his pamphlet to prove his point.<sup>81</sup> Correspondents from the East were given this same reason as a necessity for the action by the Society secretaries.<sup>82</sup> In the Northwest sentiment was united in expressing the belief that this section would welcome the new rule.<sup>83</sup> The secretaries explained the rule to the missionaries and officials in the Middle West as being in harmony with the decision of the Presbyterian Church that slaveholding was "prima facie evidence against a church. We make it no more." The agents were asked to pass the

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<sup>81</sup>A.D. Smith, op. cit., 46.

<sup>82</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter No. 2457, Badger to P.H. Fowler, March 30, 1857.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., E.D. Morris, Columbus, Ohio, May 6, 1857; J.H. Newton, Cleveland, Ohio (agent), May 30, 1857; Warren Jenkins, Trenton, Ohio, May 9, 1857; D.H. Coyner, Lexington, Ohio, March 30, April 20, 1857; N.C. Robinson, Vinton, Iowa, April 13, 1857; G.G. Rice, Bluffs, Iowa, May 7, 1857; Henry Little, Madison, Indiana, April 28, 1857; H. B. Holmes, Belvidere, Illinois, February 1, 1858; Aratus Kent, Galena, Illinois, April 20, 1857; Albert Hale, Springfield, Illinois, April 3, 1857; A.L. Harrington, Peru, Illinois, April 5, 1857.



information on to the judicatories.<sup>84</sup> The pamphlet, "Home Missions and Slavery," was distributed throughout the Northwest.<sup>85</sup> When the presbyteries of the Northwest met in the spring of 1857, the AHMS found a staunch ally. In most cases approval was unanimous or without a recorded vote.<sup>86</sup> Marshall Presbytery approved the action of the missionary organization by only one vote. The agent for this region

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., Letter Book, 1857, II, Letter No. 1905, Badger to A.L. Chapin, January 19, 1857; No. 1906, Coe to Aratus Kent, January 20, 1857. Vol. III, Letter No. 2357, Albert Hale, March 5, 1857. New York Evangelist, March 5, 1857.

<sup>85</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Letter Book, 1857, III, Letter Nos. 2659, Coe to J.A. Reed; 2660, to Kent; 2661, to Little and Newton. C.E. Rosenkrans to Secretaries, Columbus, Wisconsin, June 5, 1857. Correspondence of Rev. Dexter Clary, Home Missionary Superintendent, Beloit, Wisconsin, 1855-1867 (Manuscript: Carroll College, Waukesha, Wisconsin), Clary to Badger, February 15, April 1, 1857.

<sup>86</sup>See Records of the following Presbyteries: Alton, 1850-1863, II, 90; Cleveland, 1847-1870, 164; Belvidere, 1847-1863, 77; Franklin, 1846-1860, I, 266; Madison, 1838-1857, 390-91; Logansport, 1844-1870, II, 164-65; Cincinnati, 1844-1870, II, 327; Indianapolis, 1839-1863, I, 327; Trumbull, 1847-1861, II, 231-32; Columbus (Wisconsin), 1856-1865, I, 33; Kalamazoo, 1850-1865, II, 115. Records of the Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, I, 356. Presbytery of Ottawa: Gould, op. cit., 186. AHMS Correspondence: Nahum Gould to Coe, La Salle County, Illinois, April, 1856. Presbytery of Coldwater: AHMS Correspondence: William Fuller to Badger, Sturgis, Michigan, May 13, 1857. The question was indefinitely postponed to take up other matters in the Presbyteries of St. Joseph and Elyria: Records of the Presbytery of Elyria, 1842-1863, 296, 302. AHMS Correspondence: William Fuller to Badger, Sturgis, Michigan, May 13, 1857.



attributed this close vote to the influence of George Duffield, who was bitterly opposed to the new rule.<sup>87</sup> The only western judicatory that took a stand against the new regulations of the Executive Committee was the Presbytery of Detroit. This body petitioned the Assembly to denounce the attempt of a voluntary society to establish ecclesiastical control over the Presbyterian Church. The action of the AHMS was denounced as "tending towards the establishment of an ecclesiasticism ... far worse and more dreaded and condemned than the inquisitorial powers of any secret organization or order, or the irresponsible despotism of absolute, arbitrary episcopacy."<sup>88</sup> These resolutions, which were stronger than any drawn up by the Eastern branches of the Church, came from the pen of Duffield.<sup>89</sup> He was opposed to any action which would split the Church. This strong churchman had a grievance against the New York Missionary office that went back to 1850. At that time the Society had refused aid to the Second Presbyterian Church of Detroit, and the Presbytery of Detroit had made good

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<sup>87</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Calvin Clark to Badger, Hillsdale, Michigan, May 5, 1857.

<sup>88</sup> Records of the Presbytery of Detroit, 1855-1869, IV, 203, 228. New York Evangelist, May 7, 1857.

<sup>89</sup> Duffield's Diary, 1856-1858, VI, April 3, 14, 1857, 44, 48.

Duffield's threat to establish a Presbytery missionary association.<sup>90</sup>

Early in May, 1857, the annual meeting of the AHMS came out in full support of the decision of the Executive Committee. The officers were considered to have acted in harmony with the constitution of the body. It was the obligation of the officers "to be guided by the known intentions of those whose agents they are." A strong anti-slavery sentiment had grown up in "New England, New York, and the western states, from which more than nine-tenths of the revenue ... are received. They prefer not to patronize and propagate the System of American Slavery!"<sup>91</sup>

The battle lines were now formed for the fight in the Assembly. Before the meeting of this body J.M. Sturtevant came East for the Home Missions convention and preached a powerful sermon, in New York and Brooklyn, on missionary objectives, American expansion, and slavery. Sturtevant said it was inevitable that free labor would push out slavery and bring its destruction as the northern borders were expanded and free institutions moved westward. The

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<sup>90</sup> AHMS Correspondence: Calvin Clark to Badger, Marshall, Michigan, April 16, July 10, November 27, 1851. Records of the Presbytery of Detroit, 1848-1853, III, 116-17.

<sup>91</sup> Report of the American Home Missionary Society, 1857 (New York: John A. Gray, 1857) , 127-29.

instrument of this great conquest, he said, was the Missionary Society.<sup>92</sup> Milton Badger testified to the effectiveness of the sermon and rushed to put it into print.<sup>93</sup> But the battle over missions did not materialize in the Assembly. The political events and the new aggressive position of defense for slavery in the South left the East with the necessity of choosing between the West and the South. With little hesitation the East chose the West. When the Assembly of 1857 met, and the Northwest asked for prosecution of slaveholders, in order to hold this section, it was necessary for the parent body to condemn the open support of slavery by South Lexington Presbytery. As a result, the Southern judicatories withdrew from the New School Churches.

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<sup>92</sup>J.M. Sturtevant, American Emigration: A Discourse in Behalf of the American Home Missionary (New York: American Home Missionary Society, 1857), 26-27.

<sup>93</sup>AHMS Correspondence: Letter Book, 1857, III, Badger to Sturtevant, May 21, 1857.

## CHAPTER VI

### ANTI-SLAVERY LITERATURE AND THE TRACT SOCIETY

At an early date the abolitionists recognized the effectiveness of using printed material to spread their doctrine. It was natural to expect that they would make an effort to persuade the societies distributing religious literature to promote their cause. The American Tract Society, organized in 1825, was the chief agency performing this service. As early as 1835 Elijah Lovejoy created an uproar in Missouri when it was discovered that he had shipped copies of the Emancipator in boxes of Bibles that he was sending out for distribution.<sup>1</sup> When the Free Presbyterian Church was established, John Rankin and others set up the Western Tract and Book Society. This was partly the result of the fact that the American Tract Society, more than any other voluntary association, had resisted the efforts of the abolitionists to get a hearing in the organization. Slavery was one of the chief topics about which the publications of Rankin's new society dealt.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The Wickett-Wiswall Collection of Lovejoy Papers, (Manuscript: Southwest Collection, Texas Technological College, Lubbock, Texas), S.G. Hart to E.P. Lovejoy, September 8, 1835. (Microfilm: Illinois Historical Society, Springfield, Illinois).

<sup>2</sup>John Rankin, op. cit., Life of John Rankin, 56-57. Oberlin Evangelist, June 8, 1853.



In 1852 the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention of Wisconsin informed the American Tract Society that "fidelity to the Gospel demands ... at least the same prominence to the sin of oppression" as to other sins.<sup>3</sup> The Synod of Western Reserve expressed a desire in 1855 to see the publication society "act more directly on the subject of slavery,"<sup>4</sup> and the next year the Presbytery of Grand River took up the same question for discussion without decision.<sup>5</sup>

The policy of the Tract Society was to refrain from publishing material that was not generally accepted by all sections, and all participating denominations. During the early fifties, however, several Congregational Associations and the Independent made efforts to get this policy reserved.<sup>6</sup> In February, 1856, the Executive Secretaries of

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<sup>3</sup>Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, I, 266.

<sup>4</sup>Central Christian Herald, October 11, 1855.

<sup>5</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Grand River, 1849-1867, III, 141-143.

<sup>6</sup>Independent, September 20, November 22, 1855. Smith, op. cit., Revivalism and Social Reform, 194.

the Society found it necessary to issue a letter explaining its position in reference to human bondage. It had practiced the policy of leaving out of publications lines or phrases which would be regarded as unjust, harsh, and denunciatory. Very little had been published on slavery because few publications of this kind had been laid before the Society. The secretaries agreed that there were certain aspects of the problem on which Christians, both North and South, might agree which should be published.<sup>7</sup> At the annual meeting of the Boston branch of the Tract Society in May, 1856, a resolution was adopted that the publication committee should publish material on slavery in accordance with its letter of February of that year.<sup>8</sup> A committee of fifteen was selected by the national society to inquire into and review the proceedings of the Executive committee. All except one member of the fifteen agreed, "that those duties which grow out of the existence of slavery as well as those moral evils and vices which it is known to promote, and which are condemned in Scripture, undoubtedly do fall within the

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<sup>7</sup>Central Christian Herald, May 1, 1856.

<sup>8</sup>Report of the American Tract Society (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1856), 4.

province of this Society."<sup>9</sup> Albert Barnes was on the select committee, and the measures agreed on were in harmony with the ideas expressed in his recent book.<sup>10</sup> At the annual meeting of 1857, the national body approved these resolutions as a course of action.<sup>11</sup>

The New York Observer declared, "It was a measure of agitation. A most unwise concession to this spirit of agitation."<sup>12</sup> "Let a book containing any sentiment offensive to Southern Christians issue from the Society, and its circulation will be instantly and effectively proscribed," warned the Southern Presbyterian of Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>13</sup> The Central Presbyterian, of Richmond, considered the resolution insulting. "Southern Christians contend that slavery as it exists among us is an institution recognized and justified by Scripture, and that the evils incident to it are not evils which flow from the system,

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<sup>9</sup>Liberator, May 29, 1857. New York Observer, May 14, 1853.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, 194. Presbytery Reporter, III, No. 18 (February 1, 1857), 431.

<sup>11</sup>Central Christian Herald, November 5, 1857.

<sup>12</sup>New York Observer, May 21, 1857.

<sup>13</sup>Cited by Liberator, June 19, 1857.

but from the depravity of human nature," declared the editor.<sup>14</sup> The South Carolina branch and the Georgia auxiliary of the Society voted to withdraw if the annual meeting of 1858 did not rescind the measures adopted in 1857.<sup>15</sup> It was said that the feeling was so strong in the South that colporteurs were "forced to flee" the region.<sup>16</sup> Thomas Smyth, a board member of the South Carolina branch, wrote a letter to the New York Observer expressing the feelings of the South concerning the new regulations. A tract, "The Duties of Masters," had already been agreed on by members of the select committee, but W.A. Hallock, secretary of the national office in New York, wrote Smyth that the executive board had laid the tract aside.<sup>17</sup> On June 15, 1857, Hallock addressed a private circular to Southern agents informing them that the Publication Committee did not propose to publish tracts on the Southern institution.<sup>18</sup> When word got abroad in the North

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., July 10, 1857.

<sup>15</sup> Liberator, July 10, 17, 1857.

<sup>16</sup> [James Russell Lowell], "The American Tract Society," The Atlantic Monthly, II (July, 1858), 247.

<sup>17</sup> To Evangelical Christians: The Suppressed Tract! and The Rejected Tract (New York: John A. Gray, 1858), 3-4. Thomas Smyth, op. cit., 279.

<sup>18</sup> Liberator, July 17, 1857.



and West that the circular had been sent to the South, the secretaries in New York felt compelled to explain their action. It was felt that the Society had no intention of pursuing a course which would debar it from the South or cause the withdrawal of a field "embracing nearly 10 million souls." The secretaries were convinced they were in harmony with the resolutions of the committee of fifteen which had resolved that a policy should be followed which would "promote the widest and best usefulness" of the Society throughout the "whole country."<sup>19</sup> This position was sustained by the executive committee when it met on March 18, 1858.<sup>20</sup>

The feeling of the western Presbyterians was revealed by the reaction of the western judicatories of the New School to this new interpretation of the resolutions of 1857. The Synod of Illinois asked the next annual meeting "either to remove the present Directory, or cause them to fully carry out the intentions of the Society."<sup>21</sup> The Presbytery of Alton threatened to withdraw if the policy of the

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<sup>19</sup>Central Christian Herald, November 5, 1857.  
Liberator, August 14, 1857.

<sup>20</sup>New York Observer, April 15, 1858.

<sup>21</sup>Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1856-1869, (N.S.), 45.

secretaries were not reversed in 1858.<sup>22</sup> That the policy was reversed was also regretted by the Synod of Indiana, and the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention of Wisconsin.<sup>23</sup>

As the debate grew, the New York Observer called on the Society to follow its constitution. "If the publication of the whole New Testament, with suitable notes and comments, is not sufficient to express the testimony of this Society on the subject of slavery," said the editor, "is it probable that any testimony could be constructed in which Evangelical Christians, North and South, can agree?"<sup>24</sup> When the Independent called on the Society to turn its present directors out, the New York Evangelist objected that this course was "neither just nor right in itself, wise, nor expedient, nor at all necessary for the end in view."<sup>25</sup> As the annual meeting of 1858 drew near, the Independent began to rally the Congregationalists and others to attend the meeting in order to free the Society of its directors.

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<sup>22</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Alton, 1850-1863, II, 192.

<sup>23</sup>Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1846-1857, (N.S.), II, 219. Convention of Wisconsin, 1840-1861, I, 356.

<sup>24</sup>New York Observer, March 4, 1858.

<sup>25</sup>Cited by New York Observer, April 1, 1858.

The anti-slavery forces published a pamphlet, "The Rejected Tract," and included on the cover sheet a notice of the meeting.<sup>26</sup> The New York Observer and the Presbyterian urged all conservatives and those who wanted a national society to come out and vote to sustain the publication committee.<sup>27</sup> The Pennsylvania branch asked all its members to be present at the annual meeting and informed them that the abolitionists were electioneering in Pennsylvania with a circular signed by Nathan Beman and others.<sup>28</sup>

When the meeting convened and the position of the directors of publications was sustained, the New York Observer was overjoyed with the victory.<sup>29</sup> The Central Christian Herald declared, "The Tract Society has bowed to Southern dictation. She has meekly received the gag -- the pro-slavery brand is upon her brow." The editor said that the Journal of Commerce had sounded the trumpet and called "on the merchants to leave their business for the great battle."<sup>30</sup> The editor of the Chicago Congregational Herald,

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<sup>26</sup> See note 17, page 256.

<sup>27</sup> New York Observer, April 15, May 6, 1858. Presbyterian, May 1, 1858.

<sup>28</sup> Presbyterian, May 8, 1858.

<sup>29</sup> New York Observer, May 20, 1858.

<sup>30</sup> Central Christian Herald, May 20, 1858.

who attended the meeting, said that a total of 1337 tickets were issued and 653 of these went to voters from New York City and Brooklyn.<sup>31</sup> James Russell Lowell, writing in the Atlantic Monthly, pointed to the influence of cotton on the Tract Society in reference to the meeting.<sup>32</sup>

In October, 1858, the Synod of Western Reserve broke with the New York Society. Resolutions were introduced praising the merits of the American Reform Book and Tract Society, but the meeting finally voted to approve and recommend the Evangelical Tract and Book Society of Western Reserve.<sup>33</sup> The Synod of Michigan and the Presbyteries of Greencastle, Indiana, and Grand River, Michigan, expressed regret at the action of the American Tract Society.<sup>34</sup> The Presbyterian and Congregational Convention of Wisconsin resolved to withdraw from the New York group because of its

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<sup>31</sup>Cited by Oberlin Evangelist, May 26, June 23, 1858.

<sup>32</sup>Lowell, op. cit., 250-51. See Gasparin, op. cit., 82. Smith, Revivalism and Social Reform, 195. Dumond, Birney Letters, II, 1168-1169, Joshua Leavitt to Birney, January 23, April 10, 1855.

<sup>33</sup>Records of the Synod of Western Reserve, 1846-1867, II, 273, 180.

<sup>34</sup>Records of the Synod of Michigan, 1858, 29. Records of the Presbytery of Greencastle, 1851-1860, 185-86. Records of the Presbytery of Grand River, 1857-1870, 19.



"studied expurgations of anti-slavery sentiment from its literature" and because of the publication of "a tract fitted to countenance and sustain slavery." The convention recommended that its churches contribute to the Society at Boston or the American Reform Book and Tract Society at Cincinnati.<sup>35</sup> But in the East the Old School Synods of New York and Albany supported the action of 1858.<sup>36</sup>

The Boston branch of the Tract Society withdrew from the national organization and became independent after the annual meeting in New York in 1858.<sup>37</sup> It organized an auxiliary in Hartford, Connecticut, in opposition to the old New York group.<sup>38</sup> By 1860 the independent Boston organization had published at least four tracts on slavery.<sup>39</sup> It followed the principles that were recommended in the special report of the committee of fifteen of 1857 which declared, "The political aspects of slavery lie entirely without the proper sphere of this Society, and cannot be

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<sup>35</sup>Convention of Wisconsin, 1840-1861, I, 385.

<sup>36</sup>New York Observer, October 28, 1858.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., August 11, 1859.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., January 13, 1859.

<sup>39</sup>Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the American Tract Society, 1860, op. cit., 13, 15, 18.

discussed in its publications." Thus all of its tracts concerned the moral aspects of human bondage. In regard to this, the Evangelical Repository said, "We are surprised that thinking men, intending to do battle with slavery, should have fettered themselves by any such declaration. Slavery is wholly a political institution."<sup>40</sup>

Another independent association largely under control of the Congregationalists was organized in Chicago. The Central Christian Herald, however, advised those who wanted to sustain an anti-slavery society to give their money and influence to the Cincinnati body. "To talk about getting up a fourth Society shows great ignorance ... and great recklessness," said the editor.<sup>41</sup> The Presbytery Reporter felt that Presbyterian ministers had already had "about enough of partnership societies at present."<sup>42</sup>

The New York American Tract Society refused to publish material dealing with any phases of the Southern institution. When the slave trade question was brought up in 1859 and a tract was suggested on this subject, Gardiner Spring moved that the measure be put aside. As a concession

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<sup>40</sup>Evangelical Repository, XIX, No. 11 (April, 1861), 599-600.

<sup>41</sup>Central Christian Herald, October 13, 1859.

<sup>42</sup>Presbytery Reporter, V, No. 5 (January 1, 1860), 136.

he introduced a resolution on the "wickedness of reviving that iniquitous system in any form."<sup>43</sup> In 1860 only a single voice was raised in defense of anti-slavery tracts.<sup>44</sup>

The Old School Assembly had its own Board of Publications which was relatively free from controversy on the "vexed question." In 1846 it published Alexander Keith's Prophecies. A section dealing with slavery was omitted. The deleted portion which was included in the Harper's edition was as follows: "What ever events the prophecies reveal, they never sanction any iniquity or evil .... And any defence or attempted justification of slavery, ... must be sought in vain."<sup>45</sup> The feeling in the West was strongly opposed to this alteration. Joshua L. Wilson, of Cincinnati, wrote his son that "The alteration of Books by the Board of Publications must be ended or their books will lie unsold ...."<sup>46</sup> No judicatory, however, went on record as censuring this action, but measures to this effect were introduced

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<sup>43</sup>New York Observer, May 19, 1859. Liberator, June 24, 1859.

<sup>44</sup>New York Evangelist, May 17, 1860.

<sup>45</sup>Evangelical Repository, IV, No. 12 (May, 1846), 577.

<sup>46</sup>Joshua L. Wilson Papers, VIII, 1843-1885, J.L. Wilson to Samuel Wilson, May 16, 1846.

into the Presbytery of Lake, Indiana, but were tabled.<sup>47</sup>

The Board of Publications quickly restored the omitted section and denied any intention of purposeful omission.<sup>48</sup>

When a hymn book was published, a verse containing anti-slavery sentiment was left out of a hymn. Robert Breckinridge, who was on the publications committee, was responsible for the printing. He denied that he and his brother, John Breckinridge, had the slightest desire to favor slavery. All the other members of the committee were from the North, and Breckinridge was convinced that they had no desire to promote the Southern institution.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Lake, 1842-1857, (O.S.), I, 85.

<sup>48</sup>Robinson, op. cit., 78.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 79.



## CHAPTER VII

### FOREIGN MISSIONS AND SLAVERY PROBLEMS

After 1838 the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was officially connected with only the "Constitutional" Presbyterian Church and the Congregationalists. But as individuals many Old School adherents continued to support this voluntary society, even though there existed a Board of Foreign Missions in the "Reformed" Assembly. Although the American Board refused to consider the question of human bondage in 1840, it resolved in 1841 to "sustain no relation to slavery which implied approbation of the system."<sup>1</sup> The New York Observer expressed approval. "It needs no defense," declared the editor. "It commends itself to the cordial approval of every reasonable man at the North or South ...."<sup>2</sup> The Signal of Liberty felt the Board intended to "steer a middle course," and treat servitude as "an abstract question" but was obliged to lean a little away from slavery out of respect to the New England

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<sup>1</sup>Report of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, 1841, 60. Hereafter: Report ABCFM.

<sup>2</sup>New York Observer, October 2, 1841.

contributions.<sup>3</sup> On February 17, 1842, the Emancipator carried an article stating that some of the missionaries from the South were known to be slaveholders.<sup>4</sup> A letter appeared in the New York Observer identifying John Leighton Wilson, a Presbyterian field worker in West Africa, as belonging to this class, and giving the facts in his case.<sup>5</sup> Contributors asked the American Board to clarify the relations of this missionary to the Southern institution. Wilson had written his superiors six years earlier that he had inherited the servants before he was born and had tried to emancipate them. He had refused to compel them to separate from him as a master, even though the relation was an economic burden. One servant would not willingly depart from him. No new information had been gathered since 1836, but the secretaries had written for additional facts. The ABCFM adopted a committee report that it was desirable that Wilson terminate the relation of servant and master "with as little delay as circumstance will permit."<sup>6</sup> The Watchman of the Valley

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<sup>3</sup>Signal of Liberty, October 6, 1841.

<sup>4</sup>Cited by Signal of Liberty, March 23, 1842.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., April 6, 1842.

<sup>6</sup>Report ABCFM, 1842, 46. John Bailey Adger, My Life and Times, 1810-1899 (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publications, 1899), 136-37, 140-42.

considered the action in the Wilson case "to be just and candid."<sup>7</sup> The abolitionist sheet, the Western Citizen, interpreted the measures as utterly disqualifying slaveholders from being missionaries. "This is as firm and open as it is just," said the editor, "and goes quite as far as can be asked."<sup>8</sup> In 1843 the Commissioners of Foreign Missions added that Wilson was justified only if he withheld his sanctions to the system.<sup>9</sup> By 1846 Rufus Anderson, one of the ABCFM secretaries, reported that this case had cost the society one-half of its annual resources.<sup>10</sup> In 1837 there had been at least a dozen slaveholders in the foreign missionary work, and by 1852, when Wilson retired, the American Board had no one in foreign service connected with the Southern Institution.<sup>11</sup>

At the annual meeting of the society in 1843 the commissioners refused to agree not to solicit funds from those connected with human bondage or to send out field

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<sup>7</sup>Watchman, September 29, 1842.

<sup>8</sup>Western Citizen, September 30, 1842.

<sup>9</sup>Watchman, July 6, 1843.

<sup>10</sup>Adger, op. cit., 140.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 143. Report ABCFM, 1853, 50-51.

workers holding this relationship. "We cannot allow ourselves to be turned aside," explained the Board.<sup>12</sup> These petitions for action were prompted by a letter from the secretaries of the society appearing in the Vermont Chronical in response to the editor's request for information. The Watchman of the Valley felt that abolitionists should not leave the Board because they disagreed with it.<sup>13</sup> In 1844 the commissioners reaffirmed the refusal to reject money from contributors connected with slavery. The next year the society admitted that twenty slaveholders were members of mission churches which they supported among the Choctaw Indians. Although the ABCFM was "convinced of the wrongfulness and evil tendencies of slaveholding," the missionaries among the Indians and their churches were "the rightful and exclusive judges" of what constituted "adequate evidence of piety and fitness of church fellowship."<sup>14</sup> "The Lord's Supper cannot be scripturally and rightfully denied to those who give credible evidence of repentance and faith in Christ," ruled the commissioners. This was almost the

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<sup>12</sup> Report ABCFM, 1843, 67.

<sup>13</sup> Watchman, July 6, 1843.

<sup>14</sup> Report ABCFM, 1844, 68; 1845, 59.



identical position taken by the Old School Assembly four months earlier.<sup>15</sup>

In 1845 the Sand Creek Presbyterian Church, in the Presbytery of Indianapolis, drew up a series of resolutions in which the soliciting of funds from slaveholding churches was condemned. These measures were sent to the American Board, to the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention meeting in Detroit that year, and to the Synod of Indiana.<sup>16</sup> In answer to the Sand Creek Church the Synod of Indiana regretted the relations of the missionary societies to slavery but still commended them to the "liberal patronage" of the churches, since "no better, purer, safer, ... more efficient agents" existed. The Synod expressed the hope that whatever imperfection existed would be "speedily corrected."<sup>17</sup> The Synod of Cincinnati earnestly requested the commissioners of Foreign Missions to recede from the ground taken in the report of 1845 in which mission churches were not censured for admitting slaveholders.<sup>18</sup> The Presbytery of Portage considered the question of the missionary society

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<sup>15</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, XII, No. 4 (January, 1860), 745-46. Report ABCFM, 1845, 55. Assembly Minutes, 1845, 17.

<sup>16</sup>Watchman, May 22, 1845.

<sup>17</sup>Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1826-1845, I, 358.

<sup>18</sup>Watchman, October 30, 1845.

and concluded that the position of the Board did not imply approval of the system of servitude. The demand that money be refused from slaveholding churches was declared by the Presbytery to be contrary to Scripture.<sup>19</sup> The Presbytery of Scioto deeply deplored the Choctaw situation and asked that the Commissioners of Foreign Missions withdraw patronage if the evil were not removed after suitable efforts.<sup>20</sup> A committee was selected by the Presbytery of Buffalo to make a thorough "inquiry into the alleged relations of the ABCFM to Slavery." The committee reported, "There is not, and never has been, any unchristian relation between the American Board and slavery." The report was adopted by Buffalo.<sup>21</sup> To the New York Observer the position of the Board was now clear. Those who could not sustain the foreign missionary society under its doctrine should "find other channels through which to give the gospel to the destitute."<sup>22</sup>

The Salem and Greenfield, Ohio, Churches, in the

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<sup>19</sup> Watchman, May 7, 1846.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Alleged Relation of the ABCFM and Slavery (Buffalo: Committee of Buffalo Presbytery, 1846), 31.

<sup>22</sup> New York Observer, September 20, 1845.

Old School Presbytery of Chillicothe, contributed to the American Board rather than to the Foreign Missionary Board of the "Reformed" Assembly. These churches chose the voluntary society because of their strong anti-slavery sentiment. Salem Church agreed that the American Board should not refuse contributions from the South, but informed the society that the church could not continue to sustain the Commissioners of Foreign Missions if the decision of letting the Choctaws hold slaves was maintained. The Greenfield Church declined further support as a result of the stand the Board had taken concerning the Choctaw Mission.<sup>23</sup>

As the criticism of the ABCFM increased, the New York Observer trusted that the Board had the "firmness and moral courage" to refuse further attempts to turn it from the "appropriate business." The editor again invited the abolitionists to leave the society since they could not "prosecute the missionary work on the principles by which Christ and his apostles prosecuted it."<sup>24</sup> In contrast, when a missionary to the Dakota Indians questioned the authority of the American Board to regulate church discipline, the Watchman of the Valley took issue with him.<sup>25</sup> When the

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<sup>23</sup>Watchman, February 19, March 19, 1846.

<sup>24</sup>New York Observer, September 5, 1846.

<sup>25</sup>Watchman, July 30, 1846.

Commissioners of Foreign Missions met in 1846, the society declined to take any new action, since it "considered further agitation of the subject here as calculated injuriously to affect the great cause of missions."<sup>26</sup>

After 1846 two new members with strong anti-slavery inclinations were added to the Prudential Committee which was the executive committee of the American Board.<sup>27</sup> One of these, Selah B. Treat, from the Presbytery of Newark, was selected by the secretaries of the society to visit the Choctaw Nation and make a detailed report on the relations of the missionary churches to the problem of human bondage.<sup>28</sup> After visiting the Indian missions, Treat addressed a letter to the missionaries giving them the views of the secretaries of the Board. The field workers to the Indians were informed that they should disown slavery. The only question was that of time and mode. If twenty-five years was not enough time, the missionaries were informed, "We may well ask when will it come?" New members were to be told that human bondage was prima facie evidence of the lack of piety if proof was

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<sup>26</sup> Report ABCFM, 1846, 73.

<sup>27</sup> Adger, op. cit., 148.

<sup>28</sup> Report ABCFM, 1847, 59.



not furnished that it was otherwise.<sup>29</sup> The Prudential Committee committed itself to the "Treat Letter." When Treat's report was made public, the committee revealed that laws had been passed by the Choctaw Nation prohibiting the teaching of slaves to read or permitting emancipation except by application to the General Council of the tribe. At times missionaries had hired bond servants.<sup>30</sup> But in defense of those who were taking the gospel to the Indians, the executive committee wrote that slavery existed among the Choctaws before the Scriptures were brought to them. Treat suggested that the clergymen stationed among the Indians address a letter to the Prudential Committee presenting their views.<sup>31</sup> The pastors of the Indian churches answered, if the executive board should deny patronage, "it will not be for the violation, on our part, of any condition on which we were sent into the field; but in consequence of new conditions with which we cannot in conscience comply."<sup>32</sup> "Thirty years here cannot be equal

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<sup>29</sup> Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXI, No. 1 (January, 1849), 24.

<sup>30</sup> Report ABCFM, 1848, 84-85, 90.

<sup>31</sup> Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXI, No. 1 (January, 1849), 2.

<sup>32</sup> Presbyterian Expositor, II, No. 11 (November, 1859), 609.

in their religious influence on slavery, to two hundred years in the Carolinas," they continued. To the suggestion that the hiring of slave labor be discontinued, they answered, "With us it has been a matter of necessity."

The missionaries particularly complained of the Presbyterian and Congregational Conventions held since 1845, especially the Chicago Convention of 1847.<sup>33</sup> These conventions had met in Detroit, Akron, and Chicago, as well as in other cities.<sup>34</sup> The executive committee assured the religious workers in the Indian missions that "the rights of your sessions and your churches must be duly regarded .... When you have exhausted your powers of persuasion by use of the Scripture," the member must be left "answerable only to the higher judicatories of your church, and to their Lord and Master." The missionaries were asked, however, to discontinue the use of hiring bond labor in the boarding schools.<sup>35</sup>

When the Board met in 1848, it found human bondage to be "at variance with the principles of the Christian

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<sup>33</sup>Report ABCFM, 1848, 97-100. Letter from the Choctaw Missionaries to the Prudential Committee, March 31, 1848.

<sup>34</sup>Signal of Liberty, July 5, 1845. Watchman, July 15, 1847. New York Observer, July 5, 1845. Ohio Observer, February 10, 24, July 14, 1847. New York Evangelist, July 8, 1847. Western Citizen, July 13, 1847.

<sup>35</sup>Report ABCFM, 1848, 104, 110. Letter to Prudential Committee to Choctaw Missionaries, June 22, 1848.

religion." But confidence must be placed in the missionaries, and differences of opinion between them and the Commissioners of Foreign Missions must be tolerated to the same extent that it was by the presbyteries and associations, it indicated.<sup>36</sup> The Choctaw Nation belonged to a presbytery in the Old School and the Cherokee Nation was served by Congregationalists. The committee that drew up the report for the Board was headed by Albert Barnes and Nathan Beman, both Presbyterians and "decidedly the most anti-slavery members ... present." The committee recommended that the Indian question be left in the hands of the Prudential Committee. The abolitionist circles said this was done to avoid furnishing Joel Parker, of the Fourth Presbytery of New York, and other "pro-slavery" men with an opportunity to attack the "Treat Letter."<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Blanchard proposed an amendment to the Barnes-Beman report to the effect that the hiring of slave labor should be discontinued and that servitude was prima facie evidence against the piety of a candidate applying for admission to the Church. This would have been an approval of the principles of the "Treat Letter" which Barnes' committee had suggested retaining in the hands of the executive board. Blanchard offered to withdraw his

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<sup>36</sup>Report ABCFM, 1848, 69.

<sup>37</sup>Western Citizen, October 17, 1848.

proposal if the fact that it had been presented was allowed to be printed in the report. When this was denied, Blanchard and Lyman Beecher appealed to the meeting to grant this concession in the interest of holding the West. "Throughout the whole broad West, rank and file of the sacramental host will go off in platoons from the Board, if once it be fairly understood that the subject of slavery is to be shut out from the Board," warned Beecher. The concession was granted, but Parker informed the Board that it was not going "too fast, but ... going wrong."<sup>38</sup>

The Presbyterian of the West found the proceedings of the Prudential Committee to border on ultra abolitionism. It was probable, concluded the editor, that the Indian missions would soon be abandoned unless the next Board meeting declined to carry out the views of the Prudential Committee.<sup>39</sup> In reviewing the action of the ABCFM, the Biblical Repository said the society was not an ecclesiastical body. "Authority to judge in matters of doctrine does not belong to the Board," said Charles Hodge, the editor. Under the existing conditions in the country, the adoption of the "Treat Letter" by the Commissioners of Foreign Missions

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<sup>38</sup>Report ABCFM, 1848, 112. Watchman, October 5, 1848.

<sup>39</sup>Presbyterian of the West, October 5, 1848.



would be "a national calamity." In reference to the question of hired servants, the editor declared that everyone in the North used the products of slave labor.<sup>40</sup> The article in the Repertory effectively challenged the "Treat Letter."<sup>41</sup> By February, 1849, the secretaries of the society published an open letter stating that the "Treat Letter" expressed "only opinions then and still entertained by the Committee." These opinions were not to be interpreted as "decisions or instructions."<sup>42</sup> At its 1849 meeting the Board added that it had "never had any intention of 'cutting off' the Choctaw mission." The missionaries' last communication which maintained that slave labor with them had been "a matter of necessity" was accepted by the society for the time being.<sup>43</sup> When the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention of Wisconsin met in October, 1848, it expressed "extreme grief" to learn the facts concerning the Indian missions, but rejoiced in the efforts of the committee "to free those

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<sup>40</sup>Biblical Repertory, XXI, No. 1 (January, 1849), 21. Southern Presbyterian Review, XII, No. 4 (January, 1860), 750.

<sup>41</sup>Adger, op. cit., 149. Southern Presbyterian Review, XII, No. 4 (January, 1860), 750.

<sup>42</sup>New York Observer, March 3, 1849. Herald of the Prairie, March 28, 1849.

<sup>43</sup>Report ABCFM, 1849, 72, 75.

churches from all connexions" with the "great evil."<sup>44</sup> In April, 1849, the Presbytery of Belvidere heartily commended the Prudential Committee on investigating the relations of the Indian missions to slavery. Belvidere expressed hopes that the whole body would "fully sustain and carry out the position of the Committee."<sup>45</sup> In the autumn of 1849 the Presbytery of Long Island expressed confidence in the ABCFM. "We cordially sympathize with that body in the difficult and perplexing circumstance through which it is at present passing," resolved this Eastern judicatory.<sup>46</sup> The Christian Observer indignantly condemned the anti-slavery feature of the proceedings of the Board.<sup>47</sup> "If those Indian Missionaries are morally bound thus to abjure Slavery as 'a system always and everywhere sinful,' why are not all we who live in the American Slave States, morally bound to do the same thing?" questioned the Southern Presbyterian Review. "Dismiss your anxieties about the civil liberty of the Slave.

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<sup>44</sup>Records of the Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, I, 200. Stephen Peet, History of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches and Ministers in Wisconsin (Milwaukee: Silas Chapman, 1851), 43.

<sup>45</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Belvidere, 1847-1863, 16.

<sup>46</sup>New York Evangelist, September 6, 1849.

<sup>47</sup>Cited by Herald of the Prairie, April 18, 1849.

... He needs another and better freedom .... You have begun at the wrong end," advised the Review.<sup>48</sup> In reference to the likelihood that the abolitionists would continue to pressure the society, the New York Observer said, "Let us hope that the wisdom from above may be continued to this venerated Board that it may ever reject the counsels of the foolish, and adhere as in times past to the oracles of God."<sup>49</sup> "It would make the blood come to our cheek to believe that while the Wilmot Proviso which forbids the extension of our republic in connection with slavery is maintained, the professed Church of Jesus Christ will not cease to propagate a Christianity blighted by the curse of slavery," complained the Herald of the Prairie while reviewing the action of the American Board.<sup>50</sup>

Following the introduction of the Nebraska Act in Congress, the Commissioners of Foreign Missions met at Hartford, Connecticut, under the full blast of excitement about the admission of Kansas. During the previous November the Choctaw Council passed a law that prohibited teaching slaves to read in the missionary school. The

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<sup>48</sup> Southern Presbyterian Review, II, No. 4 (March, 1849), 585-86.

<sup>49</sup> New York Observer, September 22, 1849.

<sup>50</sup> Herald of the Prairie, April 18, 1849.



superintendent and trustees were required to be vigilant to locate and remove abolitionists. The Prudential Committee and the Board condemned these laws and asked the missionaries to withdraw from the operation of the boarding school.<sup>51</sup> To the suggestion that the Indian question be returned to the executive committee, J.M. Sturtevant warned that in the Northwest there already existed a disposition to forsake the American Board because it had not come out and taken "open ground." Lyman Beecher supported him in these views, and John C. Holbrook, a Congregationalist from Chicago, said, "I should hardly dare to go back to the West, and confess that I am a member of this Board if you refuse to take such action." For the first time the Commissioners actually approved the "Treat Letter."<sup>52</sup> The conservatives forced a vote on the question of returning the whole matter to the executive committee in order to avoid having the Board approve the "Treat Letter." But they were voted down nineteen to fifty-five. Fifteen of these Commissioners were Presbyterians. Six voted to return the problem to the secretaries, while nine were in favor of adopting the

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<sup>51</sup>The Citizen, September 30, 1854, citing Journal of Commerce, September 21, 1854. Report ABCFM, 1854, 23-24.

<sup>52</sup>New York Observer, September 21, October 5, 1854.



resolutions.<sup>53</sup> Treat and Asa D. Smith were among the nine.

After this action of the ABCFM, the Wisconsin Presbyterian and Congregational Convention resolved that its "confidence was greatly increased" by the adoption of the measures.<sup>54</sup> The Synod of Michigan adopted a report of an interim committee which characterized the Board as "thoroughly anti-slavery in its spirit and action. Its position is just what is desired by those who are wholly opposed to American slavery."<sup>55</sup> The New York Observer reminded its readers that the only purpose of the society was "the salvation of perishing souls."<sup>56</sup>

The "Treat Letter" went further than the missionaries would admit by opposing the hiring of slave labor or

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<sup>53</sup>The six votes to return the question to the Prudential Committee were divided as follows: four from the New School Synod of New York-New Jersey, one from the New School Synod of Western Pennsylvania, one from the Old School Synod of Albany. The nine votes for approving the "Treat Letter" were divided as follows: two from the Old School Synod of Albany, four from the New School Synod of New York-New Jersey, one each from the New School Synods of Geneva, Cincinnati, and Illinois.

<sup>54</sup>Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, I, 308-309.

<sup>55</sup>Detroit Daily Democrat, June 21, 1854.

<sup>56</sup>New York Observer, October 12, 1854.

admitting unexamined slaveholders to communion.<sup>57</sup> Secretary Rufus Anderson was in the East Indies when the annual meeting of 1854 took place. In his absence the Prudential Committee sent acting secretary George Wood, of the New School Fourth Presbytery of New York, to visit the Choctaw mission. Wood secured a statement of policy that the missionaries agreed to follow in the mission work. This agreement was in accord with the interpretation of the institution of human bondage by the Assembly Act of 1818 and the American Board of 1845. Missionaries were to examine those admitted to communion with reference to their views concerning servitude, but only to the degree that other equal moral questions were examined, "not less not more .... While slavery is always sinful, we cannot esteem every one who is legally a slaveholder a wrong-doer for sustaining the legal relation," agreed the missionaries. Employment of slave labor was to be limited to those cases "of manifest necessity." This platform was accepted by the ABCFM when it met at Utica in 1855. After hearing an explanation that the Choctaw laws which concerned the teaching of servants to read were not enforced, the society voted to continue the mission schools for the time being.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Presbyterian Magazine, V (October, 1855), 47.

<sup>58</sup>Report ABCFM, 1855, 18, 23-24, 26.

When the Wood platform was published in the New York Observer, the missionaries sent their protest to the Utica meeting, but it was ignored. Since the society based its action in 1855 on the report by Wood, the missionaries sent in their resignations. But with Rufus Anderson back on the executive committee, the Board asked the missionaries to withdraw their resignations, and they agreed to do so if the "Treat Letter" were repudiated. The Board did not accept this compromise, but continued to vote money to support the missionaries.<sup>59</sup>

The New School Presbyterians in the West did not show the enthusiasm that they had shown in removing slavery from the AHMS. While the Presbytery of Springfield expressed confidence in the Board, the Presbyterian and Congregational Convention of Wisconsin asked the ABCFM to adopt "a course similar to that of the American Home Missionary Society."<sup>60</sup> But by 1858 when the Commissioners convened for the annual meeting, the American Missionary Association and the Western Home and Foreign Missionary Society had made such extensive inroads on the patrons of the older society that some kind of new action was necessary. The

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<sup>59</sup>Adger, op. cit., 151. New York Observer, October 20, 1859.

<sup>60</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Springfield, 1856-1866, IV, 25. Wisconsin Convention, 1840-1861, I, 384.



ABCFM noted that the Choctaw Nation had been affected by the neighboring white community from which the Indians had drawn their standards. "It seems desirable that the Board should be relieved, as early as possible, from the unceasing embarrassment and perplexities connected with the missions in the Indian territory," concluded the report.<sup>61</sup> In October, 1858, Treat wrote the missionaries, encouraging them to withdraw from the Board or from all connection with the Southern institution; but the clergymen in Indian service referred the question back to the Prudential Committee to "be disposed of" as they saw best.<sup>62</sup> The Prudential Committee dealt with the issue by terminating the connection of the ABCFM with the Choctaw Mission.

When the society met in 1859, Albert Barnes of the committee on the Indians reported that the Prudential Committee's action was premature. A minority report sustained the position of Treat and the other secretaries. Thomas Brainerd of the Fourth Presbytery of Philadelphia informed the body that if the secretaries were sustained it would not make a favorable impression in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. A minority report that approved

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<sup>61</sup>Report ABCFM, 1858, 17-18.

<sup>62</sup>Adger, op. cit., 156. New York Observer, October, 13, 1859.



the termination of the Board's connection with the mission was adopted in a modified form.<sup>63</sup> Eleven Presbyterian clergymen voted on the measure. All were New School members from the East. Nine voted against cutting off the mission. The two votes cast in support of the position of the secretaries were cast by Treat and George Wood -- both involved in the decision of the Prudential Committee.

One of the chief justifications for the action of the ABCFM in 1859 was that the Indian missions should be taken over by the mission board of the Old School. The Independent had suggested this as early as 1849.<sup>64</sup> One of the officers of this voluntary society had claimed that separation from the Indian mission had been demanded by New England. To this the New York Observer replied, "The deplorable result has been produced by a supposed necessity of yielding to the dictates of Christian expediency. It is needless to say that in this view of expediency we do not concur." The Christian Observer viewed expediency as an unworthy motive, since important principles were settled by

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<sup>63</sup>Report ABCFM, 1859, 21-23. New York Observer, November 24, 1859.

<sup>64</sup>Independent, April 12, 1849.

the decision.<sup>65</sup> As human bondage was the cause of withholding the gospel, the Presbyterian asked, "Is this the sin which, above all sins, renders their case hopeless and consigns them to perdition?"<sup>66</sup> "Had the senior Secretary ... rallied the conservative strength ... there might have been achieved ... the glory of another Tract-Society victory -- a victory over fanatical clergymen by sober and rational laymen!" declared Adger, writing in the Southern Presbyterian Review. The Board "has elected to claim no longer a national but a sectional status ..." It has chosen to become, "the organ of the Congregational churches alone," he added.<sup>67</sup> The New York Evangelist withheld censure, since "no other mode of relief from this continually perplexing question" was open to the Commissioners.<sup>68</sup> "Doubtless if Paul himself were now on earth, and were a missionary to the Choctaws, ... he would share the same fate," concluded the Presbyterian Expositor.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>New York Observer, October 20, 1859, citing Christian Observer, October 13, 1859.

<sup>66</sup>Presbyterian, October 15, 1859.

<sup>67</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, XII, No. 4 (January, 1860), 737, 778.

<sup>68</sup>Cited by New York Observer, October 20, 1859.

<sup>69</sup>Presbyterian Expositor, II, No. 11 (November, 1859), 611.

When the Old School synods met, there was a general feeling that the Board of Missions of the "Reformed" Assembly should take over the Choctaw churches.<sup>70</sup> The executive committee of the Old School Board of Missions met to consider the Indian question, and the secretary, J. Leighton Wilson, announced that the committee had voted to support the Choctaw churches.<sup>71</sup> Early in 1860, Gardiner Spring called a convention of Presbyterians associated with the "Reformed" Assembly to consider the Indian question and to raise funds. The convention approved a resolution endorsing the action of the Old School Missions Board in promising aid to the Indians. As chairman of the resolutions committee, Spring reported a resolution which stated, "There is no authority in the Scripture for such a principle of Administration" as that which regards "a slaveholder an outcast from the kingdom of Christ; that no church ought to be regarded as unchristianized because some of its members

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<sup>70</sup>See Records of the following Synods: Chicago, 1856-1869, 71; Northern Indiana, 1843-1864, 277-78. For the Synods of Ohio, New Jersey, Philadelphia, and New York, see: Presbyterian, October 29, November 5, 19, 1859. New York Observer, October 27, November 3, 1859.

<sup>71</sup>Presbyterian Magazine, X (February, 1860), 89-90.

are slaveholders." Members of the convention expressed fears that the resolution would drive away aid that they could secure in New England and would raise the question of slavery in the Church. A delegate reminded Spring that the policy of their Assembly was to refrain from discussing the divisive question. Joseph McElroy questioned the expediency of discussing slavery at this time. He had bought and sold slaves and would do so again under similar circumstances, and remarked that he preached to the same effect.

But Spring held his ground, and the convention rejected a motion to table the measure. Another committee, however, was finally selected and brought in a resolution to the effect that it recognized "no standard of procedure in the great enterprise of Christian missions but the instructions and conduct of Jesus Christ and his apostles."<sup>72</sup> When the "Reformed" Assembly met, they sustained the decision of the Board of Missions.

The western Presbyterians did not exert as much influence against the connection that the ABCFM maintained with slavery as they did in the case of the AHMS. While the American Board received more pressure from New England, the Home Missionary Society found it necessary to follow

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<sup>72</sup>Liberator, April 6, 1860, citing New York Evangelist.



the lead of the western Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Since the people in the West had many churches that needed aid, and since they were in direct competition for the limited resources of the AHMS, this section of the country was less tolerant of their Southern brethren who did not meet the standards that the West had set up for them.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A NORTHWESTERN SEMINARY

The question of an Old School theological seminary for the West became thoroughly interwoven with the slavery problem during the 1850's. The Seminary of the Northwest had existed as a department of Hanover College from 1830 to 1840. During the latter year the New Albany Theological Seminary was established in Indiana. In 1849 E.D. MacMaster was elected to a professorship of theology over the objections of N.L. Rice, one of the members of the Board of Directors.<sup>1</sup> Rice, who edited the Presbyterian of the West at that time, attacked MacMaster as an abolitionist, and for this reason found him unfit, since he did not hold a "scriptural view of slavery."<sup>2</sup> In a series of articles Rice characterized MacMaster as opposing the position of the Church on slavery. As evidence he pointed to MacMaster's refusal to accept the acts of the Assembly of 1845 and his

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<sup>1</sup>John F. Lyons, "The Attitude of Presbyterians in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois Toward Slavery, 1825-1861," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XI, No. 2 (June, 1921), 78.

<sup>2</sup>Presbyterian of the West, November 1, 1849. E.D. MacMaster, "Letter to the Board of Directors of the Theological Seminary of the North West," in McCormick Theological Seminary Miscellany (McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois), 22. N.L. Rice, "North Western Theological Seminary," in McCormick Theological Seminary Miscellany (McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois), 2-7.

efforts to substitute other measures for resolutions approving those which were reported by a committee of the Synod of Cincinnati. MacMaster was one of the two who disagreed with the Synod of Cincinnati's approval of the position of the Assembly. MacMaster was defended by the Louisville Presbyterian Herald which pointed out that he was elected to his position by a Board of Directors with a majority from slave states. The Board supported MacMaster even though it was aware of his action in 1845 which had been published in the Herald by MacMaster himself.<sup>3</sup> Although New Albany was having difficulty surviving, Rice opened the Cincinnati Theological Seminary in opposition to the New Albany Seminary, and urged a unified school in this city for all of the West.<sup>4</sup> William Breckinridge and Edward Humphrey, of Kentucky, backed New Albany and MacMaster in the pages of the Herald and in a pamphlet which pointed out that New Albany was "admirably situated to serve the two parts of the country whose interests are supposed to be in conflict." Rice's "clamor against Dr.

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<sup>3</sup>Cited by Presbyterian of the West, November 15, 1849.

<sup>4</sup>Presbyterian of the West, February 14, March 7, 21, 1850, November 17, 1857. Presbyterian Expositor, I, No. 1 (December 15, 1857), 44-45.

MacMaster is without the shadow of foundation," the pamphlet declared.<sup>5</sup>

But a movement was growing in the Southwest for a seminary south of the Ohio River. The Synod of Nashville adopted resolutions to this effect in 1850.<sup>6</sup> In the General Assembly of 1853 the question of establishing a seminary in the West was taken up, and extensive debate took place concerning the location of the school. Robert Breckinridge spoke for Danville, Kentucky, as the site, since schools already existed in the West north of the Ohio. He claimed that the opposition to this site came from those who wanted to discriminate against the South because of its institutions and took Samuel Steele, of Chillicothe, to task for opposing the site. This opposition was "entirely on abolition grounds .... It is time that not only abolitionists, but that all men should be taught that they of the South were not to be cut off from the fair franchises of the Church because they reside South of Mason and Dixon's line," he said. The Church voted to make Danville the site.<sup>7</sup> The selection of Danville, however, was an abandonment of the

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<sup>5</sup>W.L. Breckinridge and Edward Humphrey, Theological Seminaries in the West (Louisville: Hull and Brother, 1850), 18, 37.

<sup>6</sup>Presbyterian of the West, November 7, 1850.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., May 26, June 16, 1853. Presbyterian Advocate, June 8, 1853. Free Presbyterian, September 7, 1853.



idea of a single institution in the West. The school at New Albany which was to have been merged into the new school was continued under synodical management.<sup>8</sup> The Synod of Cincinnati and others refused to support the new school and retained New Albany.<sup>9</sup> Rivalry between Danville and New Albany came out into the open. The report of the Board of Directors of New Albany expressed regret that the seminary of Danville had been especially urged with reference to the question of slavery. For the Assembly to have established a school on such an argument "strongly tends to a divisive course," declared the report. "The responsibility for the schismatic course rests with the Danville Seminary and the attempt to shift the odium was unworthy a fair and honourable opponent."<sup>10</sup> Danville answered New Albany in a defense printed in the Presbyterian, and the Presbyterian Advocate regretted that "the unpleasant ... discussion was forced upon the Danville men."<sup>11</sup> But MacMaster and

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Miller, Presbyterian Reunion: A Memorial Volume, 1837-1871 (New York: DeWitt C. Lent and Company, 1870), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Records of the Synod of Cincinnati, 1844-1864, IV, September 29, 1853. Galbraith, op. cit., 199.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Board of Directors of the New Albany Theological Seminary (Cincinnati: John D. Thorpe, 1853), 7, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Presbyterian Advocate, June 7, 1854.

others recognized that New Albany could no longer get sufficient support in the present location.<sup>12</sup> During the General Assembly of 1854 a meeting of commissioners from the Northwest was held, and a call was issued for a convention to meet at Freeport, Illinois. Another meeting was called to gather at Galena, Illinois, and an agenda was drawn up for the occasion which included the question of the proper distribution of educational institutions. A similar convention was held in Indiana.<sup>13</sup> In August, 1856, MacMaster and sixteen others, mostly Directors of the Seminary, acting in an unofficial capacity, sent a pamphlet to the churches and judicatories in the Northwest that currently supported the New Albany Seminary. It proposed the establishment of a new seminary that could more adequately serve the area covered by the seven synods. In September, 1856, the question was officially brought before the synods by MacMaster and two others.<sup>14</sup> A constitution was drawn up and land was secured south of Chicago as the site of the

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<sup>12</sup>William E. Dodd, "The Fight For the North West, 1860," American Historical Review, XVI (April, 1913), 781-82.

<sup>13</sup>New York Observer, August 17, November 23, 1854.

<sup>14</sup>Presbyterian Magazine, VII (November, 1857), 518.

school.<sup>15</sup> MacMaster and T.E. Thomas, one of the leading Old School abolitionists, both of whom had been professors at New Albany, were elected professors of the new seminary. It was generally assumed that MacMaster would be the president of the institution. When the Board met in Chicago, it made use of a rule that a two-thirds vote was necessary for the admission of any synod to participate in the operation of the school. The Synod of South Iowa was admitted, but Missouri was rejected.<sup>16</sup> On January 22, 1857, the St. Louis Presbyterian, edited by Rice, charged the new seminary with being the embryo of a training school for abolitionists. Rice declared:

It is evidently the design of Drs. MacMaster and Thomas to form a thoroughly abolitionist seminary in the Northwest, and there to train young men to become agitators and destroyers of the peace of the Church. Let all who love the peace and unity of the Presbyterian Church at once throw their decided influence against this unhallowed attempt to divide its councils and destroy its efficiency.

Missouri had been tricked out of its rights, and a constitution had been adopted likely to keep the Synod out of

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<sup>15</sup>"Letter of MacMaster to the Reverend Board of Directors of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the Northwest," in McCormick Theological Seminary Miscellany, 19.

<sup>16</sup>Presbyterian, December 5, 1857.

the school, Rice charged.<sup>17</sup> He saw the new seminary as likely to become another Oberlin and appealed in a personal canvass to the ten synods of the Northwest to turn over the whole business to the next meeting of the General Assembly.<sup>18</sup> MacMaster had been one of the few Old School men who had spoken up in public against the extension of slavery to the territories.<sup>19</sup> He sent a paper to the Board of Directors of the Seminary vindicating himself of the charges Rice and others had made against him. He explained that it was "generally if not universally understood" that Missouri had terminated its connection with New Albany in 1853 in preference for Danville "by an express condemnation of its reorganization" and a refusal to appoint Directors to the school. The charge that he was an abolitionist was denied. MacMaster said that he stood on the platform of the Church

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<sup>17</sup>E.D. MacMaster, Speech in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, May 30, 1859, on the Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the Northwest (Cincinnati: Gazette Company, 1859), 6-7. Presbyter, March 1, 1860.

<sup>18</sup>Dodd, loc. cit., 782.

<sup>19</sup>E.D. MacMaster, The Nation Blessed of the Lord: A Sermon Preached in the First Presbyterian Church, New Albany, July 6, 1856 (New Albany, Indiana: Norman, Morrison and Matthews, 1856), 24. E.D. MacMaster, The True Life of A Nation (New Albany: Norman, Morrison and Matthews, 1856), 30-32, 44-46. Thomas, op. cit., 59.



as adopted in 1818.<sup>20</sup> A similar paper was sent to the various synods that sponsored the seminary. The position of MacMaster met general approval in the synods. Cincinnati approved his stand but went on to "deprecate the attempt ... to make the incidental differences, ... on the subject of slavery, a test of qualification for any department of usefulness or responsible Service in the Church."<sup>21</sup> The Synod of Iowa unanimously expressed satisfaction with the position of the Church on slavery, but voted fourteen to six, with seven excused, that the Synod was "happy to find Dr. MacMaster concurring therein." Only one negative vote was recorded on the resolution expressing confidence in MacMaster.<sup>22</sup> The Synods of Indiana and Northern Indiana approved the position of MacMaster.<sup>23</sup> The Synod of Chicago voted to turn the Seminary over to the Assembly, but Illinois rejected a similar measure only to return to an

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<sup>20</sup>Letter of MacMaster to the Board of Directors, 13, Presbyterian Magazine, VII (November, 1857), 520-21.

<sup>21</sup>Records of the Synod of Cincinnati, 1844-1864, IV, 467.

<sup>22</sup>New York Observer, October 29, 1857.

<sup>23</sup>Records of the Synods of: Indiana, 1849-1860, II, 510; Northern Indiana, 1843-1864, I, 244.

adjourned meeting and vote to put the Assembly in charge.<sup>24</sup>

Rice's charges had been sown upon fertile ground. The conservatives feared anything that had the appearance of giving a free hand to the anti-slavery West. They observed a renewal of anti-slavery unrest in the West. After the overtures for admission to the Old School Church were made in 1857 by the Southern New School seceders, the Presbyteries of Chillicothe, Marion, Wooster, and Richland, and the Synod of Ohio took a stand against this by opposing admission or by reaffirming the Acts of 1818.<sup>25</sup> The New York Observer noted that the Presbyterian of the West was the only abolitionist journal in the Old School Church, and advised this paper to keep its opinions out of the Assembly.<sup>26</sup>

In Chicago, Cyrus McCormick was also concerned about the Northwest and the destiny of the country. He felt that the seminary, if located in Chicago under the direction of the right men, could go far in winning the Northwest for the cause of conservatism and save the Union from division. McCormick made efforts to secure the transfer of N.L. Rice

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<sup>24</sup>Records of the Synods of: Chicago, 1856-1869, 36-37; Illinois, 1856-1869, II, 84-85.

<sup>25</sup>Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1857-1867, III, 18-20. Records of the Presbytery of Wooster, 1854-1870, III, 75-76, 79-80. Central Christian Herald, October 29, 1857.

<sup>26</sup>New York Observer, November 12, 1857.

to Chicago in 1854,<sup>27</sup> and succeeded in getting him to make the change in 1858. Rice published the Presbyterian Expositor from this more strategically located point. At the time the transfer of the seminary from New Albany came up, McCormick had written his brother that he intended to try to get the school located in Chicago. It would be of "importance to our cause," concluded McCormick.<sup>28</sup>

The Presbyterian Magazine, edited by the powerful Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, supported Rice. It "would have been better to have waited for clearer proof" before taking action that had the appearance ... of unfraternal separation" of the Missouri Synod, he explained.<sup>29</sup> A pamphlet was released by "A Ruling Elder of the Northwest" attacking the position of Van Rensselaer. The Northwest would not be driven from its "impregnable and scriptural ground ... maintained by the Assembly for 60 years," wrote the author. "In the commercial cities of the seaboard and of the border, good men ... may be drifting from their mooring by the

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<sup>27</sup>Cyrus McCormick Papers (Manuscript: McCormick Library, Madison, Wisconsin), C.H. McCormick to N.L. Rice, December 3, 1854. Presbyterian, November 28, 1857, citing Chicago Daily Press.

<sup>28</sup>McCormick Papers, C.H. McCormick to W.S. McCormick, December 1, 1856.

<sup>29</sup>Presbyterian Magazine, VII (June, 1857), 262.



marvellous power of commercial and business associations, and of social sympathy," but "in the rural districts it is not so likely to be so," concluded the elder.<sup>30</sup> Thomas E. Thomas, MacMaster's close ally in the struggle, felt all was lost when he discovered an important layman in Chicago, C.A. Spring, had gone over to Rice. If the synods transferred the school to the Assembly it would "be as safe as that of Columbia, South Carolina," he wrote to a correspondent.<sup>31</sup> The whole Southern press was denouncing the seminary and every Northern paper was unfriendly except the Presbyterian of the West, according to Thomas.<sup>32</sup> Late in 1857 Rice published a pamphlet in which he included two private letters that MacMaster had written to C.A. Spring. MacMaster had interpreted the plan to transfer the Northwest Seminary to the Assembly as a scheme designed to put men in the institution who would be "sufficiently subservient to our slave-driving rulers and their allies in the so-called Free States," MacMaster had privately written.

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<sup>30</sup>"Letter to Reverend Cortlandt Van Rensselaer In Relation to the Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the Northwest by a Ruling Elder, June, 1857," in McCormick Theological Seminary Miscellany, 13.

<sup>31</sup>Thomas, op. cit., 95. Thomas to Jared Stone, August 10, 1857.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 102. Thomas to Nathaniel Fisher, October 2, 1857.



"We can now see to what use the Northwestern Theological Seminary is to be put," wrote Rice.<sup>33</sup> While discussing the publication of the MacMaster letters, the editor of the Presbyterian Magazine concluded that, "The letters of Dr. MacMaster ... will destroy his influence in the Presbyterian Church .... These letters ... virtually decide the question in favor of a transfer of the Seminary to the General Assembly."<sup>34</sup> But developing a firm conservative sentiment in Chicago obviously required a more intensive program.

During the Assembly of 1858 the Synod of Illinois proposed that the Seminary be turned over to the General Assembly, but the overture was not adopted since a quorum of the synods engaged in the enterprise had not concurred. The Synod of Cincinnati sent an overture to that of Indiana and of Chicago in the autumn of 1858 suggesting that the Seminary be transferred to the Assembly. MacMaster advocated the transfer before the Synod of Indiana. The editor of the Presbyterian of the West found no objection as long as "proscription" was not to be used in the highest

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<sup>33</sup>N.L. Rice, "Northwestern Theological Seminary," in McCormick Theological Seminary Miscellany, 16, 25; MacMaster to C.A. Spring, July 14, 1857. Presbyterian Expositor, I, No. 1 (December 15, 1857), 42. McCormick Papers, C.H. McCormick to W.S. McCormick, November 9, 1857.

<sup>34</sup>Presbyterian Magazine, VIII (January, 1856), 42.

judicatory and the wishes of the region were to be respected as in other sections.<sup>35</sup> The Indiana and Chicago bodies accepted Assembly control. In the name of harmony the Chicago group voted to admit the Synods of Missouri and Upper Missouri if they desired to co-operate in supporting the Seminary.<sup>36</sup> The Presbytery of Chicago went on record in April, 1859, for Assembly control of the school.<sup>37</sup> Before the annual meeting of the highest judicatory in 1859, Rice had carried eight of the ten western synods.<sup>38</sup>

As the Assembly of 1859 approached, the anti-slavery forces still had hopes of maintaining their influence in the seminary. They now hoped to accomplish their goal by voting Indianapolis as the site of the school and retaining the former professors. The strength of this group was concentrated in a little circle that centered about the office of J.G. Monfort, the editor of the Herald Presbyter, formerly the Presbyterian of the West. They were convinced that their hopes of retaining a voice in the seminary

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<sup>35</sup> Cited by Presbyterian Magazine, VIII (November, 1858), 520-24.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Records of the Synod of Chicago, 1856-1869, 39, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Records of the Presbytery of Chicago, 1852-1864, 187.

<sup>38</sup> Dodd, loc. cit., 782.

depended on the willingness of MacMaster to keep quiet to the extent of not even defending himself in the Assembly. MacMaster was approached with this in mind, and it was thought that the anti-slavery group had secured his agreement to remain silent.<sup>39</sup>

When the Assembly convened in Indianapolis, it voted to make Chicago the site of the school, and followed by electing Rice as the professor of theology by a large vote over MacMaster. The victory for Rice was climaxed by electing his supporters to all the other professorships.<sup>40</sup> Forty delegates of the Northwest voted for the Chicago site, and thirty-four of them voted for Indianapolis.<sup>41</sup> Just before the Assembly took up the matter of electing the professors, MacMaster rose and made a speech which required almost three hours for delivery.<sup>42</sup> The speech was interpreted as being directed against involuntary slavery, although MacMaster said that he was not denouncing that type of

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<sup>39</sup>Thomas, op. cit., 103. J.M. Wampler to Thomas, April 23, 1859.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>41</sup>Presbytery Reporter, V, No. 4 (December, 1859), 106, citing Rice.

<sup>42</sup>MacMaster Speech in the General Assembly, 1859, Thomas, op. cit., 108.



relationship.<sup>43</sup> The Presbyter and the Presbyterian Magazine attributed MacMaster's defeat to the offensive delivery and tone of his speech. An anonymous pamphlet on the seminary question denied these claims and insisted that his defeat was a foregone conclusion even before the Assembly met. L.J. Halsey, one of the professors selected along with Rice, said MacMaster was not elected to the new seminary because of his "feelings and purposes in regard to slavery which the Assembly could not sanction."<sup>44</sup> Another factor in the decisions made in May of 1859 was the gift of \$100,000 to endow the seminary. The authorization for this gift by Cyrus Hall McCormick was put in the hands of Charles Spring, a delegate to the Assembly from the Chicago Presbytery. This was "a weapon so powerful that the issue was not long in doubt." The gift was for the endowment of four professorships if the seminary was put under the control of the Assembly and was located in Chicago.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Presbyterian Expositor, II, No. 6 (June, 1859), 321-22. Princeton Review, XXXI, No. 3 (July, 1859), 593.

<sup>44</sup>"The Late General Assembly and the Theological Seminary of the Northwest, by Alpha," in McCormick Theological Seminary Miscellany, 3-7. Leroy J. Halsey, History of McCormick Seminary of the Presbyterian Church, (Chicago: McCormick Seminary, 1893), 122.

<sup>45</sup>William T. Hutchinson, Cyrus Hall McCormick (2 vols. New York: Century Company, 1930-1935), I, 20-21. Daily Chicago Times, May 27, June 8, 1859.



But there were unwritten pledges that were secured by McCormick who saw the agitation on slavery as threatening the peace and security of the country. It was his view that keeping "agitation out of the Church ... was an important means for the preservation of the union."<sup>46</sup> It was understood that the Church would maintain its position as represented by the deliverance of Rice as chairman of the slavery committee in 1845.<sup>47</sup> McCormick did not leave all of the details in the hands of Spring. During the weeks before the Indianapolis meeting Rice traveled widely over the country, and during the meeting of the Assembly "unwearied consultations" took place "in the lecture room," unknown to the public, where Rice and McCormick held their receptions while the Indianapolis meeting was convening.<sup>48</sup>

When the Church courts met in the autumn of 1859,

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<sup>46</sup> McCormick Papers: C.H. McCormick to C.D. Drake, n.d., 1869.

<sup>47</sup> McCormick Papers: C.H. McCormick to Willis Lord, January 6, 1869. C.H. McCormick to C.D. Drake, n.d., late 1869. See Statement by D.X. Junkin, Presbyterian Banner, March 24, 1869.

<sup>48</sup> "The Late General Assembly ... by Alpha," 3. McCormick Papers, B.M. Smith to C.H. McCormick, May 12, 1866. Chicago Daily Press and Tribune, May 25, 27, 1859.

the resentment against the removal from the Seminary of all the previous appointments of the synods was very evident. The Synod of Indiana dissented from the action of the Church since the known wishes of the Synod had been disregarded. It also resented that only one director out of forty had been assigned to Indiana although it had one-sixth of the church membership in the area. The Indiana judicatory, therefore, declined to recommend the Seminary to its churches.<sup>49</sup> Northern Indiana resolved that the "action was not in such consenance [sic] with our views and judgment ... as to leave this Synod under any other obligations or relations to the Seminary ... than it sustains to any other seminary."<sup>50</sup> The Synod of Cincinnati took a similar position, and the Presbytery of Cincinnati recommended Danville and Alleghany to its people.<sup>51</sup> The Presbytery of Chillicothe regretted the refusal of the Assembly to elect any of the professors who had been repeatedly selected by the synods. This was more regrettable since at least one

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<sup>49</sup>Records of the Synod of Indiana, 1849-1860, II, 548.

<sup>50</sup>Records of the Synod of Northern Indiana, 1843-1864, I, 278.

<sup>51</sup>Central Christian Herald, November 3, 1859, citing the Presbyter.

of those elected to a chair had been consistently refused by the synods. Chillicothe declined to "take any active part in sustaining the Seminary," or to "advise candidates to place themselves under its influence."<sup>52</sup> The Synod of Chicago reassured the professors of the Seminary by saying, "They have our confidence and shall have our sympathy and co-operation," but the Synod of Illinois was forced to table a resolution saying that the Synod "earnestly dissents against the present organization" of the school. A measure was later adopted by Illinois recommending the institution in Chicago "to the confidence of the churches."<sup>53</sup> The Synod of Iowa did not have a quorum and no action was taken by the Synods of South Iowa, Wisconsin, or Missouri.<sup>54</sup>

Slavery was unquestionably a factor in the seminary dispute, and was probably the most important element on the scale of conservative values in the controversy. But other factors were interwoven in the struggle. One of long standing was the personal hostility between Rice and MacMaster, which was primarily generated by Rice. Another matter

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<sup>52</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Chillicothe, 1846-1860, 301-302.

<sup>53</sup>Records of the Synod of Chicago, 1856-1869, 79.  
Records of the Synod of Illinois, 1856-1869, II, 146-48.

<sup>54</sup>Presbytery Reporter, V, No. 4 (December, 1859), 107.

that weighed in the dispute was the differences over the choice of a site for the school. The desire for regional control of the school, reinforced the opposition growing out of the anti-slavery sentiment in the West.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE CRISIS OF 1861

Unlike the New School Church the Old School of the South was not a minority fighting battles for compromised decision. During the twenty-five years from 1837-1861 the Southern Church had as many moderators as during the entire preceding forty-seven years of its existence as a united national church. From 1844 to 1861 eight of the annual general Church meetings were held in the South. The Southern Church had been fairly successful in keeping the question of slavery out of the Assembly, but a series of events began to occur in 1850 with the passage of the Compromise of that year which made it appear that to refrain from discussion in the future would be more difficult to accomplish. The policy of the Presbyterian journals in the South had been to remain silent on the "vexed question," but after the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Presbyterian papers came to the defense of human bondage. In 1856 the Southern Presbyterian Review defended servitude as being authorized by the Bible. "Since the days of Job the Church of God has had connection with this institution. It has never known an hour in its existence that it did not embrace in its membership masters and servants. The

institution of slavery is sanctioned in both the Old and New Testament," said the editor.<sup>1</sup> But when measures were introduced in the South Carolina legislature to re-open the slave trade, the editor was aggrieved to see "Southern people abandon their now impregnable position for one which they cannot hold. Our position is one that has proved, to us and to the world of our assailants, its impregnable strength. The South must not forsake that position."<sup>2</sup> The Presbyterian Expositor was "gratified to see" the Southern Presbyterian Review take this position. Rice condemned those in the North who denounced slaveholding as sin per se as well as those south of the Ohio River who denied not only that it was a sin but that it was an evil. "We are alike opposed to converting the evils of society into sins or into virtues," he declared.<sup>3</sup> Rice had accepted the position of the Review on slavery with a slight refinement. He said it was "recognized, though not sanctioned, by the Scriptures; and regulated also by Divine law." David McKinney, editor of the Presbyterian Banner, approvingly

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<sup>1</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, IX, No. 3 (January, 1856), 352-53.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., XI, No. 1 (January, 1859), 106.

<sup>3</sup>Presbyterian Expositor, II, No. 7 (July, 1859), 363-65.

accepted this refinement.<sup>4</sup> Only the Presbyterian of the West, among Old School journals, departed from the conservative position. But even in Cincinnati a group of conservative Presbyterians went on public record "disclaiming all ... implied responsibility for the course and spirit" of this anti-slavery paper.<sup>5</sup> But there was uneasiness in the Northwest. The objection of the Synod of Ohio to the admission of the Southern New School synods was followed by testimony against the renewal of slave trade.<sup>6</sup>

Those in the South who saw the unity of the Old School threatened assumed a position similar to that taken in 1837. Slavery was said to be a temporal institution that was outside the concern of the Church. This was the position taken by George D. Armstrong, of the Presbytery of East Hanover, in an article on slavery. The article was answered by Cortlandt Van Renesselaer, editor of the Presbyterian Magazine, and resulted in a series of exchanges between Armstrong and Van Renesselaer that ran from January to December, 1858. Armstrong declared, "The instruction of the Church ...

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<sup>4</sup>Presbyterian Banner, February 25, 1860.

<sup>5</sup>Joshua L. Wilson Papers, VIII, 1843-1885, No. 1007: Resolutions of Presbyterian Ministers and Elders, Cincinnati, Ohio, July, 1858.

<sup>6</sup>Presbyterian Magazine, VII (December, 1857), 572. Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1857-1867, III, 60.



has nothing directly to do" with emancipation. His adversary replied that the Church should aim at securing for the servant "the blessing of personal liberty, when Providence opens the way for it."<sup>7</sup> The New York Evangelist claimed the Ross-Armstrong Bible doctrine of slavery was largely left unrebuked by the Old School. The editor wrote:<sup>8</sup>

The Southern periodicals of course applaud. The Southern Presbyterian Review cheers on the innovators upon the old views, and seems to consider it its especial calling to set slavery upon a Scripture basis. Meanwhile Princeton is ominously silent. The Presbyterian ... has nothing to say. The New York Observer keeps true to the old chosen latitude of Mason and Dixon's line, looking both ways. The Banner and Advocate goes a little farther South to extend its kindly greeting to the Southern Review. Dr. Rice, with the gallant bearing of an old Chevalier, careless of all odds, proclaims himself ready in his Expositor, to take good care of Dr. Monfort, the Presbyterian of the West, and the western Synods, keeping down all discordant notes .... It may be rather rude for any one man to disturb a sense of harmony like this; but such a rash assailant had appeared in the person of Rev. Van Rensselaer.

In the Assembly of 1859, when resolutions were introduced commending the American Colonization Society to the consideration of the churches, James Thornwell, of South Carolina, advocated that the Church had no authority

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<sup>7</sup> Presbyterian Magazine, VIII (January, 1858), 9, 23-24, 65-66.

<sup>8</sup> Cited by Presbyterian Expositor, II, No. 2 (February, 1859), 91.



to make any deliverance upon subjects outside the spiritual domain of religious faith and moral conduct of her members. "It is not the business of the church to build asylums for the insane and the blind," declared Thornwell.<sup>9</sup> When a delegate pointed out that the Church had several times adopted similar measures on the Society, and that this new position would nullify all previous action on slavery, Thornwell advanced to the speaker and replied in a subdued voice, "There is no other doctrine that will save the Church."<sup>10</sup> After extensive debate the resolutions were laid on the table.<sup>11</sup> The Assembly took a similar position with reference to the establishment of a Presbyterian Historical Society. The Central Presbyterian, of Richmond, approved Thornwell's theory that the Church had its own exclusively spiritual sphere that it could not pass beyond to rebuke civil evil. The Presbyterian Banner, of Pittsburgh, answered the Central Presbyterian with indignation: "This is a monstrous statement to go forth, editorially, in a religious journal .... The Thornwell doctrine affords the South its only security. But the North cannot and will not

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<sup>9</sup>Princeton Review, XXXI, No. 3 (July, 1859), 607.

<sup>10</sup>Presbyterian Magazine, IX (July, 1859), 322-23, citing Central Presbyterian.

<sup>11</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1859, 543.

accept it."<sup>12</sup> The Synod of Ohio protested "the principles avowed on the floor and apparently acquiesced in by many." The Synod felt obliged to dissent from the principles advocated by Thornwell as "unscriptural and calculated to strip the Church of her moral power" and to "nullify its past testimonies."<sup>13</sup> The Presbytery of New Lisbon, Ohio, condemned "the new doctrine" and called on all its "people ... to use their influence in maintaining the old and true position of the Church."<sup>14</sup> Other judicatories in the West regretted the course taken by the Assembly on the colonization resolutions.<sup>15</sup> When the Assembly convened in Rochester in 1860, the question of colonization came before the Church again. A Northwest synod asked the parent body to re-affirm the past testimony on the subject.<sup>16</sup> As a result resolutions were adopted which disclaimed "all right

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<sup>12</sup>Cited by New York Evangelist, May 17, 1860.

<sup>13</sup>Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1857-1867, III, 55-8.

<sup>14</sup>"Presbytery of New Lisbon on the Question of Slavery," (Manuscript: Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia), No. 31803, September 14, 1859.

<sup>15</sup>Records of the Presbytery of Chillicothe, 1846-1860, 302. Synod of Chicago: New York Observer, November 17, 1859. Presbytery of Madison: Presbyter, May 3, 1860.

<sup>16</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, XIII, No. 2 (July, 1860), 410.

to interfere in secular matters," but "asserted the right and duty ... to bear ... testimony in favour of truth and holiness, and against all false doctrines and sin." Since repeated action had been taken on colonization, it was considered inexpedient to reiterate it.<sup>17</sup> The resolutions were drafted by Charles Hodge who had opposed the implications of the position of the Assembly of 1859 on the subject.<sup>18</sup> "It is now clear that the advocates of what was regarded as a new and revolutionary doctrine, and that the action of the last Assembly, had been misapprehended," he said.<sup>19</sup> The Rochester action of 1860 met general approval in the West as having sustained the Church's position on slavery.<sup>20</sup>

In the January, 1860, issue of the Southern Presbyterian Review, George Howe, of the Presbytery of Charleston, wrote an article in which he said that such events as John Brown's raid and the publication of Helper's Impending Crisis had forced him to admit that dismemberment of the

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<sup>17</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1860, 44.

<sup>18</sup>R.L. Stanton, "Disruption of 1861," in Ecclesiastical Pamphlets, I (Virginia Library: McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago), 8.

<sup>19</sup>Princeton Review, XXXII, No. 3 (July, 1860), 541.

<sup>20</sup>Records of the Synod of Ohio, 1844-1846, IV, 567-68. Synod of Cincinnati: Presbyter, October 4, 1860.



Union was highly probable. He pleaded for a strict adherence to the Constitution and the keeping of the "Covenant" with the Southern states as the only possible way of avoiding this undesirable result.<sup>21</sup> But the election of Lincoln caused a rapid change of sentiment in the South. After the election of 1860 the Christian Observer declared, "Many in the South are in earnest for secession .... We trust that good men, North and South, will bring their influence to bear in support of the union and peace of the country, by maintaining, according to the letter and spirit, the principles of the Compromise embodied in the Constitution." But the New York Observer found "that many of the most exemplary Christian gentlemen" of the South believed that the time had come for secession. The Presbyterian Herald informed the other sections that "all parties in the border ... states" were against division of the nation. They were willing to wait until Lincoln got to Washington to see what he would do. "We would urge upon the South caution and deliberation, and a disregard of counsels which would persuade them that their brethren of another section are their enemies ...; and on the North we would urge patriotic

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<sup>21</sup>F.D. Jones and W.H. Mills, History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina (Columbia, South Carolina: Synod of South Carolina, 1926), 70.



zeal to preserve the great family compact."<sup>22</sup> John Maclean, President of Princeton University, protested against the incendiary policy of the Central Presbyterian. He advised the Richmond paper to allay the unhappy excitement by studying "the things which make for peace."<sup>23</sup>

The Presbyterian Church was the last remaining strong link that bound the nation together. It was in the ranks of this Church that some of the most effective work was done to rescue the nation from its drift toward division. While discussing separation, the Presbyterian declared, "It has more than once been remarked by sagacious politicians that as long as the Presbyterian Church remained united in its wide ramifications North and South, there was hope for the country amidst the turbulence of political feeling ...."<sup>24</sup> In December, 1860, Robert L. Dabney, of Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, wrote Charles Hodge and urged him to use his extensive influence to set "on foot a movement among Christians for peace."<sup>25</sup> Hodge had

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<sup>22</sup>Cited by Presbyter, November 22, 1860.

<sup>23</sup>T.J. Wertenbaker, Princeton, 1746-1896 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 265.

<sup>24</sup>Presbyterian, December 15, 1860.

<sup>25</sup>Charles Hodge Papers, R.L. Dabney to Charles Hodge, December 12, 1860.

already decided to write an article in the Princeton Review to convince the Southern Conservatives that all Northern men were not "abolitionized," and to moderate the Republicans.<sup>26</sup> He solicited the aid of R.J. Breckinridge to exert his influence in saving the Union. Breckinridge had previously been working to keep Kentucky from following the lead of the cotton states.<sup>27</sup> George Junkin, president of Washington College, Virginia, wrote Governor-elect A.G. Curtin, of Pennsylvania, appealing to the Governor and people of his native state to meet the requirements of the Constitution and to wipe from the statute-books of the state any enactments which seemed to conflict with the national charter.<sup>28</sup>

Hodge's article, "The State of the Country," appeared in January, 1861. Hodge was the most influential man in the Church, having trained more than 2,000 seminary students. Only recently he had published two articles

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<sup>26</sup> A.A. Hodge, op. cit., 464-65, Hodge to H.A. Boardman, December 16, 1860; Hodge to J.C. Backus, December 28, 1860.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Hodge Papers, R.J. Breckinridge to Hodge, April 3, 1861. Charles Hodge Correspondence (Speer Library, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey), Breckinridge to Charles Hodge, January 19, 1861. The Papers of the Breckinridge Family, CCXIII, Hodge to R.J. Breckinridge, January 10, 1861.

<sup>28</sup> D.X. Junkin, op. cit., 512-14.

favorable to the South in Cotton Is King, edited by E.N. Elliot.<sup>29</sup> Hodge informed the South that not more than twelve clergymen in the Old School Church deserved to be designated abolitionists. Nine-tenths of the "intelligent Christian people" of the country agreed that slavery was "not morally wrong in itself," wrote Hodge.<sup>30</sup> E.D. MacMaster refuted Hodge's characterization of the Republican Party as not being an anti-slavery party. MacMaster denied that the organic laws of the country made it a duty to return slaves. "The framers of the Constitution determined that the Constitution should not know slavery," MacMaster claimed.<sup>31</sup> But the Presbyterian, the Presbyter, and the Presbyterian Banner commented favorably on Hodge's article.<sup>32</sup>

Breckinridge correctly predicted the reception of

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<sup>29</sup> Lewis G. Vander Velde, The Presbyterian Church and the Federal Union, 1861-1869 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 34.

<sup>30</sup> Princeton Review, XXXIII (January, 1861), 13-14.

<sup>31</sup> Presbyter, February 14, 1861.

<sup>32</sup> Presbyter, January 3, 1861. Presbyterian Banner, December 29, 1860.

Hodge's article in the South. He informed the editor of the Princeton Review:<sup>33</sup>

Your article, ... will not -- according to my view of things -- satisfy any, except temperate and thoughtful persons, situated as you are, and looking out upon, rather than feeling from the midst of fierce and tempestuous excitements. I should not wonder if the entire Southern press spoke ill of you for your earnest endeavor to do good.

The Southern Presbyterian Review proposed to vindicate the Southern Christians from the "amazing misrepresentations" of Hodge. "Many God-fearing men have gone heart and hand with the political movements of the South and they are neither mad men or dishonest demagogues," wrote the editor.<sup>34</sup>

The Southern Presbyterian, of Columbia, South Carolina, viewed the article as a "one-sided and lamentable attack upon the South."<sup>35</sup> Henry Boardman of Philadelphia wrote Thomas Smyth that Hodge's article did not represent in any sense an official document and should not be considered "the occasion for rending our Church asunder," as it "would be doing a great wrong on a very inadequate pretext."<sup>36</sup> In April the Princeton Review made an effort to stave off

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<sup>33</sup>Charles Hodge Correspondence, R.J. Breckinridge to Hodge, January 19, 1861.

<sup>34</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, XIV (April, 1861), 1.

<sup>35</sup>A.A. Hodge, op. cit., 463.

<sup>36</sup>Thomas Smyth, op. cit., 604.



division in the Church even if the country was hopelessly divided. "A church which regards itself as commissioned to conserve and perpetuate slavery, and a church instinct with the principles of modern abolitionism, must both alike be offensive to God, and injurious to men," Hodge declared.<sup>37</sup> The Southern Presbyterian described this new attempt of the Review as a mere defense of the Republican Party, and the North Carolina Presbyterian observed that the Church already was practically divided.<sup>38</sup> Samuel I. Prime, Old School editor of the New York Observer, proposed a National Fast Day as a means of bringing reconciliation in the Church as well as in the State. Many concurred in the suggestion and the moderator of the "Reformed" Assembly of 1860 sent out a circular to ministers and ruling elders recommending January 4, 1861, as the day set aside for the service. Buchanan also designated the same day as the official National Fast Day.<sup>39</sup> R.J. Breckinridge preached a union sermon at Stanford, Kentucky, on Thanksgiving Day, 1860,

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<sup>37</sup>Princeton Review, XXXIII (April, 1861), 325.

<sup>38</sup>Cited by New York Evangelist, May 16, 1861. See A.A. Hodge, op. cit., 254.

<sup>39</sup>Breckinridge Family Papers, J.W. Yeomans to R.J. Breckinridge, December 8, 1860. "A Day of Prayer," December 21, 1860 (Circular in Breckinridge Papers). L.G. Vander Velde, The Presbyterian Church and the Federal Union, 32.

and gave a National Fast Day address at Lexington, January 4, 1861.<sup>40</sup> The Lexington address appeared in the Cincinnati Gazette of January 5, 1861, and in the Lexington Reporter and the Presbyterian Herald. Charles Hodge had it sent to the National Intelligencer and planned to do the same for other papers. The speech was widely copied in other papers and also circulated as a pamphlet. Breckinridge called for assurance that fugitives would be returned, and for a fair division of the territory. Breckinridge's article on union appeared in the March, 1861, number of the Danville Quarterly Review. John H. Rice and Thomas A. Hoyt withdrew as editors of that journal because of the inclusion of this essay.<sup>41</sup> The Southern Presbyterian Review frowned at the article and said, "If there be no bonds to hold states together other than force and coercion, then we have solved no problem."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Breckinridge Family Papers, CCXIII, S.S. McRoberts to R.J. Breckinridge, December 3, 1860; Stuart Robinson to R.J. Breckinridge, January 24, 1861. See A.A. Hodge, op. cit., 254.

<sup>41</sup>Breckinridge Family Papers, CCXIII, Hodge to R.J. Breckinridge, January 10, 1861; John H. Rice to Breckinridge, January 25, 1861; Thomas A. Hoyt to Breckinridge, January 25, 1861. Charles Hodge Correspondence, R.J. Breckinridge to Charles Hodge, January 19, 1861.

<sup>42</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, XIV, No. 1 (April, 1861), 177.

On January 1, 1861, thirty-two influential conservative clergymen from New York and Philadelphia addressed a circular letter to the South. Fifteen of this group were Presbyterians, mostly of the Old School. They assured the South that the North did not support extremist views and that the region had been grossly misrepresented in the press and elsewhere. They appealed to the Southern clergy to exercise a moderating influence on their section.<sup>43</sup> A convention of Presbyterian ministers and elders of Pittsburgh and the surrounding area addressed an appeal to the whole country, and a group of clergymen in Chicago made a similar appeal.<sup>44</sup> A group of educators primarily from Union Theological Seminary, Virginia, sent out an address to the North and South in response to the New York circular letter, and secured signatures from Virginia and the Wilmington, North Carolina, area. The address called on the people of that section to avoid needless embitterment or complication of the crisis. It asked the North to remove the cause for separation by guaranteeing full rights for the South in the common territory.<sup>45</sup> No collective response

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<sup>43</sup>Presbyter, January 24, 1861.

<sup>44</sup>New York Observer, January 31, 1861. Presbyter, January 24, 1861.

<sup>45</sup>New York Observer, January 31, 1861.



came from the deep South, but many individual letters received from this area denied that the New York circular letter expressed the true sentiments of the free states.<sup>46</sup> Shortly after Fort Sumter was captured, the Presbyterian ministers of the Pittsburgh area met and pledged "unalterable attachment and unconditional allegiance" to the government. They called the developments in the Confederate States "treasonable" and classed as enemies of the country those who afforded "aid, comfort or countenance" to the new government.<sup>47</sup> The Southern Presbyterian of May 11 expressed surprise that the "leading ministers of the Old School at the North -- especially Dr. Spring, and the clergy of Pittsburgh," had gone over "to the support of 'Lincoln's war policy.'"<sup>48</sup>

The Thanksgiving Day sermons in the South in November, 1860, gave indications of the strength of the feelings in this region. In the sermons of both James Thornwell of South Carolina and Benjamin Palmer of Louisiana, stress was put on the determination of the slave states to maintain the Southern institution and rights of this section in

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<sup>46</sup>Gardiner Spring, Personal Reminiscences of the Life and Times of Gardiner Spring (2 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1866), II, 179-85.

<sup>47</sup>Presbyterian Banner, April 27, 1861.

<sup>48</sup>New York Evangelist, May 16, 1861.



the common territories.<sup>49</sup> The Synod of South Carolina, in November 1860, considered a proposal for withdrawing from the Church and forming a Southern Assembly, but tabled it by a vote of 77 to 21. However, substitute measures were adopted which resolved that the Southern Church was living in harmony with its Northern brethren since the Acts of 1818 had been "virtually rescinded."<sup>50</sup> The Presbyteries of Charleston and Harmony met in the spring of 1861 and voted against sending commissioners to the Assembly because of the dangers involved.<sup>51</sup> The Presbytery of South Carolina resolved that it was inexpedient to send commissioners "in the midst of the enemies."<sup>52</sup> Some of the Presbyteries in Georgia declined to send commissioners, but the Virginia Presbyterians showed "a strong desire ... to preserve the integrity of the Presbyterian Church" as long as it could be done usefully and comfortably. The Central Presbyterian

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<sup>49</sup>R.L. Stanton, The Church and the Rebellion Against the Government of the United States (New York: Derby and Miller, 1864), 50-51, 157. Thomas Cary Johnson, The Life and Letters of Benjamin Morgan Palmer (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publications, 1906), 209.

<sup>50</sup>Presbyter, December 20, 1860. Jones and Mills, op. cit., 75-76.

<sup>51</sup>Jones and Mills, op. cit., 77-80.

<sup>52</sup>Liberator, May 17, 1861. American Theological Review, III, No. 11 (July, 1861), 586.

warned that it was not safe to go to Philadelphia. "No Southern man will dare to risk his life in that city," added the North Carolina Presbyterian.<sup>53</sup>

In the Northwest most of the sermons that dealt with civic matters early in 1861 expressed firm loyalty to the Federal Government.<sup>54</sup> William A. McCorkle, of the Presbytery of Marshall, saw slavery as the sole cause of the nation's problems and advised the North to follow conscience, not expediency, in this crisis.<sup>55</sup> The measures adopted by the Synod of South Carolina brought the Northwest to an alert defense of the Acts of 1818. The Presbytery of Kaskaskia, Illinois, instructed its commissioners for 1861 to adhere strictly to the past deliverances of the Assembly if the question of slavery came up. Similar resolutions were adopted by the Presbyteries of White

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<sup>53</sup> Cited by New York Evangelist, May 16, 1861.

<sup>54</sup> Presbyter, January 3, 10, 17, 24, February 7, March 14, 1861. W.T. McAdams, What Shall Be the Position of the Presbyterian Church on the Subject of American Slavery? (Cleveland: Fairbanks, Benedict and Company, 1860), 27-32.

<sup>55</sup> William A. McCorkle, A Pure Christianity, The Only Basis of a Free and Stable Government: A Sermon Delivered November 29, 1860 (Marshall, Michigan: Statesman Book and Job Printers, 1860), 19-20.

Water, and Muncie, Indiana, as well as Saline, Illinois.<sup>56</sup>

"Vindicate the truth ... by some explicit declaration, showing you still believe and teach the sentiments uttered in 1818 ...," asked Chillicothe, since opinions had been expressed that these measures had been "virtually repealed."<sup>57</sup> Madison concurred, but the resolutions were mislaid by the clerk and not forwarded to the parent body.<sup>58</sup>

As the Assembly of 1861 drew near, the New York Observer warned, "If the old advice to 'let well enough alone,' is not strictly observed, ill will come."<sup>59</sup> The Presbyterian was convinced "that it would be prudent and wise in the Assembly to confine ... attention to routine business ..., and to avoid all other questions which may engender difference of opinion and debate ...."<sup>60</sup> The New York Evangelist urged the Assembly to follow the example of

<sup>56</sup>Records of: Presbytery of Kaskaskia, 1861-1870, 8; Presbytery of White Water, 1860-1870, II, 69. Presbyter, April 11, 18, 25, 1861.

<sup>57</sup>Galbraith, op. cit., 228.

<sup>58</sup>Presbyter, May 2, 1861. Records of the Presbytery of Madison, 1842-1862, III, 525.

<sup>59</sup>Cited by Presbyter, April 18, 1861.

<sup>60</sup>Presbyterian, May 11, 1861.

the New School and "stand boldly forth for the right."<sup>61</sup>  
 The Presbyter advised that no new action be considered, but that the records of the Synod of South Carolina not be approved.<sup>62</sup> When a correspondent from Minnesota asked the editor of the Presbyter to work to put the Church on anti-slavery grounds in order to prevent the loss of the Northwest, he replied, "We prefer ... to wait upon our Southern brethren for the 'overt act.'" The Presbyter received other similar requests but did not respond to them.<sup>63</sup>

When the Old School Assembly met there were no commissioners from the Synods of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, or North and South Carolina. Sixteen delegates represented the Confederate states as compared with ninety in the previous annual meeting.<sup>64</sup> The sessions, which were to run sixteen days, opened on May 16, less than five weeks after the fall of Fort Sumter. On the third day of the sessions, May 18, Gardiner Spring offered a paper which pledged the loyalty of the Church to the Federal Government. After

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<sup>61</sup>New York Evangelist, May 16, 1861.

<sup>62</sup>Presbyter, March 28, April 18, 1861.

<sup>63</sup>Presbyter, April 15, 1861.

<sup>64</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, XIV, No. 1 (May, 1861), 297.



discussion, the motion was tabled by a vote of 123 to 102.<sup>65</sup> Thomas E. Thomas objected to the check on freedom of discussion and the refusal to take a recorded vote. He charged the body with gagging the mouths and tying the hands of the opposition. The applause from the galleries indicated that popular will was with him and that the majority was making him a symbol of a martyred cause of rejecting his bid.<sup>66</sup> J.G. Monfort hastily wrote an announcement calling for a meeting of all who favored action in the present crisis in public affairs, to convene in the church basement following the session. W.C. Anderson, of California, formerly of Ohio, occupied the chair, and J.D. Smith, of Columbus, was secretary. On his way from California, Anderson had stopped at the office of the Presbyter in Cincinnati for consultation with J.G. Monfort, the editor. Between fifty and seventy persons were present at the meeting. They appointed a resolutions committee which prepared a paper, but after hearing Spring's new resolutions the assemblage agreed to adopt his measures.<sup>67</sup> The next day,

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<sup>65</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1861, XVI, 303.

<sup>66</sup>Presbyter, June 6, 1861. Thomas C. Johnson, The Southern Presbyterians (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1894), 326. Southern Presbyterian Review, XIV, No. 2 (July, 1861), 332.

<sup>67</sup>Presbyter, June 6, 1861.

Sunday, May 19, when Spring preached in Philadelphia, a huge audience assembled to hear him.<sup>68</sup> On May 22, Spring presented his new paper on the State of the Country and on motion by Hodge, it was made the order of business for May 24. Between May 22 and May 24, "strenuous efforts were made by some members of the Assembly, and some who were not members" to get him to withdraw his resolutions. No one worked "more assiduously and urgently" to accomplish this purpose than Henry Boardman of Philadelphia.<sup>69</sup> When the question came up for consideration the editor of the Princeton Review introduced substitute resolutions. Following protracted debate, on May 27 Hodge again moved that the whole matter be tabled. His motion lost by a vote of 87 to 153.<sup>70</sup> During the debate, Hodge made the ablest defense for loyalty to the Constitution, without committing the Church to pledge itself to support any particular government. Thomas maintained that the Presbyterian Church had a long historical tradition of loyalty to the Federal Government that should be followed in the present crisis. Anderson advocated the Spring resolutions, and informed the

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<sup>68</sup>L.G. Vander Velde, The Presbyterian Church and the Federal Union, 49.

<sup>69</sup>Gardiner Spring, op. cit., II, 187-88.

<sup>70</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1861, XVI, 321-22.

body that the Northwest would refuse to sustain the Church if the Assembly did not sustain the national flag. The West and Northwest would go off in a body and join the New School Church. He repeated the threats of secession of the churches in the West and claimed that many letters from the West had been received to this effect following the tabling of Spring's earlier paper.<sup>71</sup> One of the delegates from Wisconsin denied the claims of the men from Ohio that the West would secede if the Church did not act in accord with the Spring measures, but another from the same state was sure the "Buckeye" men had interpreted western sentiment correctly. J.W. Yeomans deprecated the appeal made to the "Northwest sentiment." When he saw this "Northwestern sentiment leaping up into the saddle behind Dr. Spring, the connection with the great question agitating the civilized world was apparent." Willis Lord, of Chicago, repelled Yeoman's imputation that the West was motivated by a desire to drive off the South because of slavery. "Refuse to pass this resolution, and you might as well give up your Domestic Missionary work," he warned.<sup>72</sup> George Frazer, of Kentucky, condemned the conduct of "Northwestern brethren" who

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<sup>71</sup>New York Observer, May 30, 1861. Presbyter, May 30, 1861.

<sup>72</sup>New York Observer, May 30, 1861. New York Evangelist, June 6, 1861.

wished "to make the Southern Presbyterians traitors."<sup>73</sup>  
 E.C. Wines, of Missouri, and others had made use of a  
 telegram from Attorney General Edward Bates to show that the  
 Government felt the Church should take no action. Six  
 delegates from the Northwest countered this action by  
 securing a telegram from Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the  
 Treasury, to the effect that he perceived no valid  
 objections to the Spring measures.<sup>74</sup>

On May 28 all of the proposals before the house  
 were referred to a committee which was ordered to report  
 later the same day.<sup>75</sup> The committee was composed of Hodge,  
 Yeomans, Anderson, Wines, H.K. Clarke, of Michigan, M.W.  
 Ryerson, of New Jersey, W.F. Giles, of the Presbytery of  
 Baltimore, J.B. White, of the Presbytery of Nashville, and  
 George Musgrave, of Philadelphia, chairman. Anderson and  
 Ryerson had emphatically supported the Spring resolutions,  
 and Musgrave had announced himself unwilling to vote for a  
 substitute. Clarke had consistently advocated Assembly  
 action. Wines, Hodge, and Yeomans had opposed a pledge of

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<sup>73</sup>Southern Presbyterian Review, XIV, No. 2 (July, 1861), 325. Danville Quarterly Review, I (September, 1861), 518.

<sup>74</sup>Presbyter, May 30, 1861. New York Evangelist, June 6, 1861.

<sup>75</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1861, 322.



loyalty to the Federal Government. When the committee returned, the chairman presented a majority report signed by eight of the nine members. It basically followed the Hodge formula. Anderson re-submitted the Spring measures as a minority report.<sup>76</sup> The majority report was rejected 84 to 128. In the North only the five eastern seaboard synods gave more votes for, than against, the majority report.<sup>77</sup> Eight votes in the border state synods and fourteen in the South went against the re-vamped Hodge measures. Since this report lost by only twenty-two votes, the slave states could have carried the majority report with the moderator's vote. The moderator would have voted for the majority measures as was evidenced by his signing of the Hodge Protest against the minority report.<sup>78</sup> The Anderson measures carried by 156 to 66 votes. Twenty-two of the adverse votes came from the East. The Synods of Cincinnati, Northern Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, and South Iowa had no negative votes. Three opposition votes came from the Synod of Ohio, but all of these were from the northeastern part of the state. Three other negative votes came from other

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<sup>76</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1861, XVI, 325, 330.

<sup>77</sup> They voted 42 for, and 30 against it.

<sup>78</sup> Assembly Minutes, 1861, XVI, 293-97, 341.

parts of the Northwest, and one from the Synod of Pittsburgh. Thus seven negative votes came from the region of Pittsburgh and westward.<sup>79</sup> Hodge submitted a protest to the Assembly action that was signed by others. The protest viewed the minority report as contrary to the constitution of the Church. "The doctrine of our church," said Hodge, "is that the state has no authority in matters purely spiritual, and the church no authority in matters purely secular and civil ...." To determine the particular government to which a member should pledge loyalty, despite differences of conscientious convictions, set up new terms of communion not provided for in the standards of the Church, reasoned Hodge.<sup>80</sup> "A declaration of loyalty to the Federal Government makes Southern members guilty of treason,"<sup>81</sup> stated the protest. Of the forty signers of the Hodge Protest, fourteen were from the North. Only five of this number were from the region west of the Appalachian divide. No delegate west of the Synod of Ohio signed the Hodge

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<sup>79</sup>Presbyter, June 6, 1861. Presbyterian, June 8, 1861. Assembly Minutes, 1861, XVI, 330.

<sup>80</sup>Princeton Review, XXX (July, 1861), 557, 564.

<sup>81</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1861, XVI, 340.

statement.<sup>82</sup> While the Assembly refused to reaffirm the action of 1818, it refused to approve the part of the records of the Synod of South Carolina which stated that the measures adopted that year had been virtually repealed.<sup>83</sup>

When the judicatories met in the autumn of 1861, the Northern churches were almost unanimous in support of the Assembly. In the Northwest only the Presbyteries of Lake, Indiana, and Hillsboro, Illinois, found it necessary to vote down measures opposing the Spring resolutions. But the Assembly measures on the State of the Country were then approved in each by a large vote. The Synod of Cincinnati followed a course similar to these bodies.<sup>84</sup> The Presbyteries of Maumee and Marion, Ohio, and Vincennes, Indiana, disapproved of the course of their commissioners who had voted against the loyalty pledge.<sup>85</sup> Almost without

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<sup>82</sup>Two were from the Presbytery of St. Clairsville, Synod of Wheeling. Two were from the Presbytery of Coshocton, Synod of Ohio. One was from the Presbytery of Clarion, Synod of Pittsburgh.

<sup>83</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1861, XVI, 333.

<sup>84</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Lake, 1857-1865, II, 117; Hillsboro, 1858-1862, 105-107. Records of the Synod of Cincinnati, 1844-1864, IV, 592-94.

<sup>85</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Vincennes, 1842-1861, III, 443; Maumee, 1853-1868, IV, 117. Presbyter, August 29, September 19, October 3, 1861.

exception, the Northwestern judicatories approved the Assembly's "State of the Country" resolution without any show of opposition.<sup>86</sup> In eastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania the Presbyteries of St. Clairsville and Coshocton, Ohio, and Clarion and Washington, Pennsylvania disapproved of the adverse vote on the Spring measures.<sup>87</sup> Thus west of the Appalachian divide, ten of the eleven votes against the loyalty pledge were repudiated, or the lowest court refused to sustain them. Five of the twenty-two adverse votes from the East were denied by the lower judicatories.<sup>88</sup> In the Presbytery of Elizabethtown, New Jersey, no action was taken until the meeting was about to adjourn. One of the commissioners of 1861 introduced a paper approving the

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<sup>86</sup> See Records of the Presbyteries of: Madison, 1842-1862, III, 544; Muncie, 1848-1865, 36; Crawfordsville, 1854-1870, II, 163; Bloomington, 1853-1870, III, 122; Chicago, 1852-1864, 296; Columbus, 1853-1869, III, 157; Lake Superior, 1857-1861, 328-30; Kaskaskia, 1861-1870, II, 15; Ohio, 1850-1862, IX, 371. For the Presbyteries of Chillicothe, Findley, Sidney, Marion, Schuyler, Cincinnati, and Michigan, see: Presbyter, September 26, October 3, 1861; Presbyterian, November 9, 1861. See Records of the Synods of: Chicago, 1856-1869, 117; Illinois, 1856-1869, II, 203; Ohio, 1857-1867, III, 98. New York Observer, November 7, 1861.

<sup>87</sup> Presbyterian Banner, June 22, 29, July 6, October 26, 1861.

<sup>88</sup> The Presbyteries of Troy and Buffalo City, New York, and Northumberland, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian, June 22, July 6, October 12, 1861.



Assembly's action which was reluctantly approved with many abstaining.<sup>89</sup> Of the large eastern seaboard bodies, only the Synod of Philadelphia took occasion to commend the stand of the parent body on the "State of the Country."<sup>90</sup> In addition to supporting the Spring Resolutions, many of the lower courts in the Northwest went on record as approving the action of the Assembly in taking exception to the records of the Synod of South Carolina. The Western judicatories considered that this rejection had in effect reaffirmed the measures adopted in 1818. Five of the eight presbyteries that went on record as sustaining the parent body on this question were from the Northwest, and all were west of the Appalachian divide. Of the eleven judicatories taking this action, only the Synod of Buffalo was from the eastern half of the country.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Presbyterian, October 19, 26, November 9, 16, 1861.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., November 2, 1861. The Presbyteries of Erie, Luzerne, and Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and Newton, New Jersey sustained the Assembly. See Presbyterian, June 22, July 6, 20, October 12, 19, November 9, 1861.

<sup>91</sup>Records of the Presbyteries of: Peoria, 1859-1870, 65-66; Logansport, 1857-1870, III, 71. For the Presbyteries of Richland and Chillicothe, Ohio, Donegal and Washington, Pennsylvania, and Highland, Kansas, and the Synods of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Buffalo, see: Presbyter, September, 5, 12, 1861; Presbyterian, June 22, October 2, 26, November 2, 9, 1861; Presbyterian Banner, October 19, 1861. New York Observer, August 29, September 5, 1861.

The Southern churches quickly moved to organize the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States. A convention met at Augusta, Georgia, on December 4, 1861,<sup>92</sup> and the new organization was established. Ten synods and forty-five presbyteries constituted the new Church, which numbered some 840 ministers and 72,000 communicants.<sup>93</sup>

The action of the Old School General Assembly of 1861 took place under the pressure of the firing on Fort Sumter, April 12, Lincoln's call for troops, April 15, and the Proclamation of a blockade of the South on April 19. It was almost impossible to prevent the surge of nationalism from rushing through the portals of the Church sitting in Philadelphia. Each day the church was filled to a capacity of over 1200 persons, and the action of the Assembly reflected the sentiment of the population beyond the rolls of the Church.<sup>94</sup> Those who resisted the action were "denounced in the streets as secessionists, as pro-slavery,

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<sup>92</sup>Minutes of the Synod of South Carolina, November 6, 1861 (Charleston: Evans and Cogswell, 1862), 7-9.

<sup>93</sup>Joseph M. Wilson (ed.), Presbyterian Historical Almanac (Philadelphia: J.M. Wilson, 1865), 333.

<sup>94</sup>Johnson, Southern Presbyterians, 326. L.G. Vander Velde, The Presbyterian Church and the Federal Union, 49-51, citing the Philadelphia Press, May 20, 1861. Danville Quarterly Review, I, No. 3 (September, 1861), 512-13.

as trucklers to the South, as traitors to their country  
 ....<sup>95</sup> The change in the temper of the Assembly between  
 May 18, when the loyalty question was tabled by a vote of  
 123 to 102, and May 27, when a motion to table the new  
 resolutions lost by a vote of 83 to 153, is indeed striking.  
 It reveals the heavy weight of influence that went beyond  
 the body commissioned to serve in the highest court. The  
 fact that similar loyalty measures had already been adopted  
 by the New School, and by the General Assembly of the United  
 Presbyterian Church, and appeared on the front page of  
 daily papers while the Old School Assembly debate was in  
 progress, strengthened the position of the anti-slavery  
 West.<sup>96</sup> Threats and rumors of union of other Northern  
 Presbyterian groups and the Old School in the West was an  
 effective weapon in the hands of the Western delegates.<sup>97</sup>  
 Supported by the galleries and urged on by letters from  
 home, the Western delegates gained control of the Assembly  
 with the aid of many from the East, such as Spring, who  
 were swept into the current by the surging waves of

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<sup>95</sup>Princeton Review, XXX (July, 1861), 543.

<sup>96</sup>Assembly Minutes, 1861, XII (N.S.), 445-48. New York Observer, May 23, 1861. New York Evangelist, May 23, 1861. Presbyter, June 6, 1861.

<sup>97</sup>Danville Quarterly Review, I, No. 3 (September, 1861), 517.



nationalism. Even though nationalism was a powerful force in the Northwest, many, no doubt, voted for the resolutions on the "State of the Country" because of their opposition to slavery in the Church.<sup>98</sup>

Viewed either as a universal Church or from the historic American tradition of the separation of the church and state, both of which were strong in the Presbyterian polity, it is impossible to find justification for the action of the Presbyterian Church on the Spring resolutions.

On November 1, 1861, the Liberator declared, "In no church have the ministers and church members been more determined in the maintenance of slavery, in none have greater hardness of heart and blindness of mind been manifested." Garrison was not a fair witness. It was the effective strength of the presbyter system of church organization rather than the failure to testify against slavery that had kept the Church united. The national ties of the Old School Church were one of the most powerful and the last effective force in the links that kept the nation united. While the "Constitutional" Assembly was strongly anti-slavery, the "Reformed" Assembly was thoroughly conservative. Although the more liberal body dramatically freed itself from all connection with slavery, its

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 518.



conservative counterpart was more successful in ameliorating the lot of the slave in such a way that it offered more hope of gradually abolishing slavery than simply removing it from the Church.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Presbytery Reporter, IV, No. 1 (May, 1853), 10.  
Evangelical Repository, XV, No. 3 (August, 1856), 191.  
Assembly Minutes, Old School, 1848, 47; 1851, 33-35;  
1855, 277-78; 1856, 259; 1857, 31-33.

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## AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I, Victor B. Howard, was born in Wallins, Kentucky, October 27, 1915. I received my secondary school education in the public school of Wallins, Kentucky, and my undergraduate training at Eastern Kentucky Teachers College and Morehead College, Kentucky. I was granted the Bachelor of Arts degree from Morehead College in 1939, and the Master of Education degree from George Peabody College in 1947. After ten years of teaching in high schools and military service schools, I served as Principal of Harlan, Kentucky, High School. Since 1950 I have been a high school history teacher in the employ of the Chicago Board of Education.









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